DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 786 RC 022 576

AUTHOR Dixon, Marion W.
TITLE Community Participation and Policy in Educational Reform Efforts: A Case Study of Knott County, Kentucky.
PUB DATE 2000-03-00
NOTE 89p.; Bachelor of Arts Honors Thesis, University of Michigan.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Citizen Participation; Community Involvement; Economically Disadvantaged; *Educational Change; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Parent Participation; *Politics of Education; *Rural Areas; Rural Schools; School Community Relationship; School Districts; State Legislation; State School District Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Appalachia; Barriers to Participation; *Kentucky Education Reform Act 1990; *Policy Implementation

ABSTRACT

A case study of an economically distressed rural Kentucky school district examined the theory that educational policy can enable community participation and that participation can enable policy implementation by affecting school governance and expanding the services provided. Primary data were gathered via interviews with four parent participants, one longtime community member activist, six educators, and one regional-level administrator who was also a longtime active community member. Secondary data came from newspapers, state government documents, policy papers, and critiques and updates of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). Findings indicate that during the decade prior to the passage of KERA, educational reform policies were few and did little to enable community involvement in the district. Participation that did exist was loosely organized, project-oriented, and individualized, due to the absence of institutionalized structures for input. Passage of KERA led to changes in the level and type of local participation by enhancing the capacity of community members to get involved, creating incentives or decreasing disincentives to participate, providing new platforms (school councils) on which to provide input, and mobilizing local actors to get involved. One constant barrier to participation was a lack of personal resources due to low socioeconomic status. Recommendations for policymakers include maintaining localized structures; helping people develop skills for civic engagement early on, such as in school; and addressing the social and economic development of low-income communities. The appendix includes the interview protocols. (Contains 32 references.) (TD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 444 786

Community Participation and Policy in Educational Reform Efforts:

A Case Study of Knott County, Kentucky

A thesis presented by

Marion W. Dixon

to

The Department of Political Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree with honors
of Bachelor of Arts
The University of Michigan
March 2000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Marion Dixon
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

RC 022576

To my advisors, Heather Hill and Susan Moffitt, and my facilitator, Professor John Campbell, for their ceaseless guidance and confidence in me. And to all of those who met and talked with me during my research, in the summer and winter of 1999. Your willingness to spend time with me and share with me your stories has kept me in awe. This work would not have been possible without all of your help.

Most importantly, to all of those who contribute to a cause greater than themselves. You are an inspiration to me and to all future generations.

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor.

--Henry David Thoreau,
Walden

All those histories of this country centered on the Founding Fathers and the Presidents weigh oppressively on the capacity of the ordinary citizen to act. They suggest that in times of crisis we must look to someone to save us: in the Revolutionary crisis, the Founding Fathers; in the slavery crisis, Lincoln; in the Depression, Roosevelt; in the Vietnam-Watergate crisis, Carter. And that between occasional crises everything is all right, and it is sufficient for us to be restored to that normal state. They teach us that the supreme act of citizenship is to choose among saviors, by going into a voting booth every four years to choose between two white and well-off Anglo-Saxon males of inoffensive personality and orthodox opinions.

--Howard Zinn,
A People's History of the United States. 1492-Present

Introduction

A few years ago Sandy Hudson, a middle-aged mother and lifelong resident of a rural, low-income community in southeastern Kentucky, established an agency to offer school-aged childcare in the schools of her community. This agency has better enabled her school district to implement its educational initiatives and, thus, to better meet the needs of its students and community. Along with other citizens, Ms. Hudson is an active participant in the schools, where residents have traditionally not been active in school and community affairs. Her active participation challenges academic discourse on participation in the democratic process. It is well established that low-income and middle-to-low-income citizens are far less likely to participate in political processes than middle-to-high-income citizens are. In accordance with this discourse, studies show a great divide exists in American society in levels of political engagement within the socioeconomic hierarchy. How, then, can we explain the initiatives Sandy Hudson has undertaken and the positive impact they have had on educational reform efforts in her community?

Literature on Participation

For a long time the SES (Socioeconomic Status) Model and Rational Choice Theory dominated the analyses offered in the political science literature on participation.[1] The SES Model focuses on socioeconomic characteristics—such as education level, income, occupation, upbringing, and race and ethnicity—to understand who participates in decision-making processes and who does not.[2] According to this model, citizens at the topmost echelons of the socioeconomic hierarchy are most likely to participate, and those at the bottom are least likely. Rational Choice Theory is related to the SES Model; however, instead of socioeconomic characteristics, the theory focuses on the cost-benefit calculations of a rational, self-interested citizen before s/he enters into political

---

[1] The chief architects of the SES Model and Rational Choice Theory are, respectively, Robert Alan Dahl, in *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961), and Mancur Olson, in *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

[2] Sidney Verba, Key Lehman Scholzman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 524.

engagements.[3] Accordingly, a citizen will only engage in political activity if the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs.

The analyses offered by more contemporary political science literature on participation go beyond the SES Model and Rational Choice Theory. The literature maintains the assumptions underlying these two approaches, however. It remains indisputable that socioeconomic status is a determinant of citizen participation.[4] High socioeconomic status can, in many respects, be considered a lone indicator of levels of participation. There are also unmistakable barriers to participation posed by the logical dilemma of collective action.[5] Therefore, political scientists still largely consider the obstacles of collective action and the components of socioeconomic status as variables predicting participation.

Verba et al. create their own model of participation, the Civic Voluntarism Model, which revises and adds to the existing approaches. Under their model, the factors that foster or discourage political activity are accumulated over the course of a lifetime, through associations with various institutions.[6] This is part of a socialization process through which citizens develop a sense of civic duty. Among these associations are social institutions such as churches and volunteer organizations. Verba et al. show that such institutions are critical to community participation because, first of all, they tend to help their members develop a greater awareness of and interest in political issues. Secondly, some recruit members to participate in various political activities. Thirdly, some are directly engaged in political activity themselves. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, they often

---

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 19; and Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), p. 5. The terms "citizen participation," "community participation," "democratic participation," and simply "participation" will be used interchangeably, unless otherwise indicated. These terms refer generally to the participation of any type of citizen—or types of citizens—in the democratic political process, whether it be in the form of voting, campaigning, community organizing, direct communication with representatives, financial contributions, or the like.

[5] Rosenstone and Hansen, pp. 6-7. The "illogic of collective action" refers to the fact that it is highly likely people will not partake in group activities, because there is little-to-no incentive to supply a good or service that everyone else in the group can enjoy, regardless of whether or not they have undertaken efforts to achieve it.

[6] Verba et al., p. 17.

help their members develop the skills needed for initial as well as subsequent undertakings within the political realm.[7] Other institutional arrangements, besides social institutions, that are far more removed from potential participants but that nonetheless shape participation, include the federalist system, separation of powers, and First Amendment guarantees.[8] Verba et al. also attribute the socialization processes of democratic participation to informal arrangements, some of which are the products of the declining role of political parties and the professionalization of campaigning.[9]

Having established the various processes through which citizens are acclimated or unaccustomed to participatory roles, the Civic Voluntarism Model names three factors that explain participation or, more accurately, why people do not participate. The first of which is *capacity* or lack thereof (the "I can't" explanation).[10] This factor is a derivative of the SES Model: It considers an insufficient amount of resources as a main barrier to community participation. In addition to the components of socioeconomic status, however, the Civic Voluntarism Model looks at a potential participant's feasible courses of action and the reasons behind the chosen alternative (i.e., the reasons for not engaging in a particular political activity or policy initiative).[11] The second factor is *motivation* or lack thereof (the "I don't want to" explanation), which is more dependent on social factors than on individual choice. Some of the social reasons for the lack of motivation are unfavorable personal experiences with the political process or officials, group exclusion, and a combination of democratic malaise and citizen participation.[12] The third factor is *networks of recruitment* or the absence of a connection to such networks (the "Nobody asked" explanation).[13] Citizens are unlikely to get involved unless others—fellow community members, parents,

---

[7] Ibid., p. 19.
[8] Ibid., pp. 7-8.
[9] Ibid., p. 8. Rosenstone and Hansen also use declining party role and change in campaign strategies as variables in their analysis.
[10] Verba et al., pp. 15-6.
[11] Ibid., p. 27.
[12] Ibid., p. 28. The authors offer the presence of democratic malaise—"skepticism about what government can accomplish and distrust of politicians"—and citizen dissatisfaction as possible explanations for the current declining rates of participation (namely in the form of voting) despite a significant rise in education levels (p. 530).
[13] Ibid., pp. 15-6.

government officials, or the local political elite—encourage them to and/or provide the means by which to get involved.

There are additional variables predicting participation, which are intended to offset participatory inequality. These include community attachments and religious institutions, both of which open the doors of politics to the less-advantaged, who have historically not been politically active.[14] Another type is what Verba et al. term *issue engagements*, which tend to have the opposite effect on participatory equality but can override the conditions set by the three main variables (capacity, motivation, and networks of recruitment).[15] If people are absorbed by a particular set of issues, for whatever reason, then the extent to which they will participate in political activity cannot be determined by these other variables. Essentially, people's passions move them to action despite the obstacles they may face or despite their previous behavioral patterns.

The variable of issue engagements, or issue salience, is also central to Rosenstone and Hansen's analysis. According to Rosenstone and Hansen, levels of political participation will fluctuate with the entrance and exit of salient issues in the political arena.[16] Issue salience is only one political factor that mobilizes people to participate, however. Another factor is the strategic choices of the political elite. The political elite mobilize citizens to get involved in political discourse when it serves their self-interests, but they do not do so when the political incentives are absent.[17] These political factors determine when people participate and when they do not.[18] The variables Rosenstone and Hansen offer to explain who participates and who does not fall largely within the SES Model and Rational Choice Theory. Rosenstone and Hansen focus on the resources, personal interests, and social involvements of potential citizen activists, and how these broadly-defined socioeconomic characteristics configure into a cost-benefit calculation.[19]

---

[14] Ibid., p. 519.
[15] Ibid., pp. 521-22.
[16] Rosenstone and Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*, p. 229.
[17] Ibid., pp. 7 & 232.
[18] Ibid., p. 7.
[19] Ibid., p. 5.

The literature on participation offers a wide cross-section of variables, including components of socioeconomic status, cost-benefit calculations, lifelong institutional associations, motivation, capacity, networks of recruitment, issue engagements, and strategic maneuvers by the political elite. However, among these variables is a missing element that has the potential to influence citizen participation in the democratic political process. This element is policy. In order to understand the ways in which policy can affect participation, we must ask four broad questions: In what ways does policy enhance community members' capacity to participate? How does policy increase the incentives and/or reduce the disincentives to participate? Does policy provide institutional platforms on which members can voice their opinions, provide input, and offer criticisms? In what way does policy serve as a mobilizing agent?

Considering the puzzle of community involvement and educational reform implementation in Kentucky, it would make sense to seek for answers within the political science literature on participation. However, it is apparent their analyses do not complete the puzzle. A broader understanding of the factors enabling community participation and those enabling policy implementation is needed to shed light on how an individual like Sandy Hudson has assumed a role in local educational reform efforts, and how her childcare agency has contributed to the implementation of these reforms.

Literature on Implementation

One prominent strand of the political science literature on implementation has emphasized the top of the implementation process, the other strand has looked at the bottom. The former strand adopts a "top-down" approach to policy implementation,[20] assessing the factors relevant to the implementation process from the perspective of those at the topmost echelons of the policy-making process. The literature focuses on the statute itself, the policy makers who form the statute, higher-

[20] Richard E. Matland, "Synthesizing the Implementation Literature: The Ambiguity-Conflict Model of Policy Implementation," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (April 1995), pp. 146-48. The approaches to policy implementation that academics, policy makers, and other interested parties can adopt to

level political actors who impact the enactment of the legislation and its implementation, higher-level government officials, and the hierarchical structure of the implementation process.

In "top-down" literature the components of the statute itself are viewed as especially important to the implementation of policy. One component of a statute is the problem or problems it addresses: How tractable are they?[21] How controversial are they? How broadly or narrowly defined are they? Another relevant characteristic of a statute is how ambiguously or how clearly it is written.[22] How clearly is it stated how the policy will be implemented, the types of roles that actors will adopt, and so forth? A third important characteristic of the statute itself is how it structures the implementation process (i.e., the extent to which it involves and organizes government agencies and officials along a hierarchical structure of decision making).[23]

Implementation literature that adopts a "top-down" approach also focuses on the decision-making processes of high-level policy makers and government officials. One factor the authors have examined is how the statute is enacted: How much conflict does it generate among policy makers?[24] Another factor cited by these authors is the response of government officials to the mandate as the reform initiatives move along the implementation process, from one administrative agency to another. A big question is: How committed are these officials to the reform policy?[25] Another important element in the implementation process is the extent to which outsiders[26] have formal access to the process. Within this context, the term "outsiders" refers to the unintended targets of the policy reform effort, its unintended beneficiaries, and the "legislative, executive, and judicial sovereigns of the [involved] agencies".[27] These authors also introduce other nonstatutory variables

---

understand the implementation process (the "top-down" versus "bottom-up" approach) will not be touched upon here, only in extracting the implementation variables each approach presents.

[21] Daniel A. Mazmanian and Paul A. Sabatier. *Effective Policy Implementation.* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1981), p. 21.

[22] Matland, "Synthesizing the Implementation Literature," pp. 160-63.

[23] Mazmanian and Sabatier, "A Framework for Implementation Analysis," pp. 21 & 25-30.

[24] Matland, pp.160-63.

[25] Mazmanian and Sabatier, pp. 25-30.

[26] The term "outsiders" will refer broadly to those who are not formally included in policy decisions or within a particular political environment.

[27] Ibid, pp. 33-4. These agencies are institutions that have control over implementing agencies.

into the implementation process, including socioeconomic characteristics, public support in the form of public opinion, and support of constituency groups.

In addition to the literature that describes influences on implementation during the pre-stages and beginning stages of the implementation process, some political science literature focuses on the importance of local elements in the successful implementation of policy. According to this "bottom-up" literature, policy makers must make their statute compatible to local settings. In order to achieve this, policy makers must first have knowledge of local politics, lest they be unable to assess the political feasibility of implementing the policy or the incentives they need to offer local actors.[28]

In order to cater to local needs and wishes, policy makers must also develop what can broadly be referred to as "technical and political strategies."[29] They will employ these strategies to ensure that their policy goals are maintained throughout the implementation process;[30] that they supply sufficient incentives to generate and maintain local actors' support for the intergovernmental policy;[31] and that they push these incentives in the right direction—toward local political authorities.[32]

The "bottom-up" literature also discusses the role local coalitions play in the implementation of social policy at the local level. Individuals who are affected by social policy are likely to mobilize into organizational units, forming networks and a group structure through which they can impact local decision-making processes.[33]

The "bottom-up" literature discusses the importance of local characteristics in shaping and implementing intergovernmental policy and includes in its analysis the involvement of local actors.

---

[28] Martha Derthick, *New Towns In-Town: Why a Federal Program Failed* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1972), p. 84; and Walter Williams, "Implementing Analysis and Assessment," in *Social Program Implementation*, ed. by Walter Williams and Richard F. Elmore (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 281-82.

[29] Williams, pp. 281-82.

[30] Eugene Bardach, *The Implementation Game: What Happens After a Bill Becomes a Law* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977), p. 66.

[31] Derthick, p. 84.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Richard F. Elmore, "Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Decisions," *Journal of Politics*, pp. 610-12.

Among these actors are those who are beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries of the policy, those whom the policy targets, and others who are directly affected by the policy. There is no indication, though, that their analyses include actors who are not directly affected by the policy, or who are motivated to participate by altruism, or who are proactive and not merely reacting to a stimulus, a perceived threat, or the like. Such actors are also absent in the analyses offered in the "top-down" theoretical literature. These authors consider the presence of outside actors and the insertion of nonstatutory variables as important elements in the implementation process. However, these actors are those who participate out of self-interest (i.e., they could personally benefit from the policy, they are included within the target groups, or they cannot sufficiently fulfill their particular professional roles without investing in the policy).

The "top-down" and "bottom-up" analyses alike only define participation within the narrow framework of rational choice theory and, thus, are missing community participation as a variable in implementation. There are a number of ways in which participation can matter to implementation, but two of the most important questions to ask in determining such a relationship are: How has participation changed the governance of social policy? How has participation impacted the services provided by social policy?

The Missing Variable in Participation: Policy

The implementation literature illustrates that statutes often impact what actors at the ground level do, thus suggesting that statutes can have an influence on community participation. Statues, or policy, can enable participation in four ways: It can enhance the capacity of individuals to participate in the policy process. If community members have already established formal and direct modes of participating in local policy-making processes, then an intergovernmental policy can make more resources and input available for these participants by establishing links between various local

entities—government, citizens, and community organizations.[34] By sharing their resources and expertise, involved local actors have a greater capacity to fulfill the roles they have adopted. Policy can also have this effect by helping individuals develop the skills to become involved in the implementation process of a reform policy. With the skills to organize an event or to contact a public official, individuals are more capable as actors within the political process. Policy can also enhance community participation by lowering the barriers associated with low socioeconomic status. Examples of such efforts would be making it so individuals do not have as many time constraints, by making arrangements so their schedules do not prevent involvement (e.g., rescheduling meetings and events in the evenings so working parents can attend).

A second way in which policy can affect participation is by increasing the incentives and lowering the disincentives associated with participation. One way to create new incentives, or lower existing disincentives, is by making the environment friendlier to outside input. If community members are not engaged in the democratic process, it may be that there is at least one element present in the system that makes them feel unwelcome. Another way to create more incentives to participate is by disseminating information. There will be more reasons to participate if an individual knows about a particular initiative, why it is important, and how s/he can impact its implementation. In addition, policy can motivate involvement by letting individuals know that their participation is valuable. Relaying a message to community members that they will have a visible, positive impact on a particular project is an effective form of motivation.

A third way in which policy can impact participation is by providing institutional platforms on which community members can engage in policy reform efforts. If a policy is designed to grant more decision-making authority to localities and, consequently, creates more projects that involve or are to be run by local actors, it will provide new opportunities for local actors to get involved in the decision-making processes. However, the extent to which these outside actors, particularly those

---

[34] Scott Allard, *Intergovernmental Relationships and the American City: The Impact of Federal Policies on Local Policy-Making Processes*, A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for a degree of

new to political activity, take advantage of these institutional platforms is contingent upon a number of factors. These factors include the availability of information on these new participatory avenues, the skill level of potential actors in using them, and the "legitimization"[35] of their involvement.

The fourth reason why policy matters to participation is that it can act as a mobilizing agent. One way policy functions as a mobilizing agent is by redefining the roles of outside actors.[36] To complement the objectives of their policy initiatives, policy makers and other government actors can request active community members to provide a service, or to modify their current services. To have a similar effect, they can also open the doors of policy-making processes to everyone—a wide-scale effort to engage the community collectively.

Lastly, policy can matter to participation by leading newly-emerged participants to adopt other participatory roles beyond the realm of the initial policy implementation process. This can be the result of two phenomena: First, by changing the dynamics of local decision-making processes, intergovernmental policy legitimizes the continued involvement of participants.[37] Second, through their initial involvement with a policy initiative, these participants gain the skills they need to engage in political discourse.

The Missing Variable in Implementation: Community Participation

The implementation literature provides evidence for why policy is a predictor of participation, and, concomitantly, the participation literature suggests participation is a factor of implementation. Within the implementation process, the impact of participants can broadly be seen in two aspects of policy: governance and provision of services. Participation can impact the governance of policy by flattening the decision-making process. If in the past the decision-making process was structured hierarchically, then participation by ground-level actors can make more actors have a greater say in the policy's implementation. In turn, this localizes decision making so upper-level actors do not

---

Doctor of Philosophy (Political Science) in the University of Michigan, 1999, chap. 8.

[35] "Legitimization" will refer to both internally-rationalized acceptance and external acceptance, depending on the context.

[36] Ibid.

solely make the decisions governing a policy. This can have the larger effect of making policy more compatible with the implementation unit. This holds true particularly if input from outside actors is specified in a given policy. In such policy circumstances, the initiatives undertaken by community members are crucial to the existence and success of the reform efforts.

Participation can impact the provision of services by, first, providing services that the government can not or has not provided. It can also expand services already provided by making them available to more members of a community and by making them more comprehensive. The ability of community participants to increase the number, breadth, and depth of services provided by a policy[38] is even greater when policy is far-reaching or over-reaching, as is often the case with intergovernmental social policies.[39] If policy has set ambitious goals, it will likely require reform measures to be undertaken outside the realm of government, or detached from its particular policy initiatives. In such instances it is not expected that the local government and traditional local actors will reach these goals within the parameters of their jurisdiction or official capacities, unless otherwise pressured. This is because bureaucratic agencies and the positions of their officials are constructed with a designated (and thus limited) capacity to respond to mandates—according to the number of personnel within an agency, the personnel's skill level, their areas of specialization, and so forth.

Existing literature overlooks the relationship between policy, community participation in local decision-making processes, and the extent to which related reform policy is implemented at the local level. Specifically, it does not address the question of how community members in low-income areas come to participate in local decision-making processes, and what type of impact their participation has on the success of reform initiatives in their communities. The first part of my theory argues that policy can enable participation by enhancing the capacity of community members

---

[37] Ibid., chap. 7.
[38] An increase in the "number" of services refers to the additional services provided; the "breadth" to the creation of a larger constituency; and "depth" to the comprehensiveness.
[39] Derthick, *New Towns In-Town*, p. 101

to get involved, by creating incentives or decreasing disincentives to participate, by providing new platforms on which to provide input, and by mobilizing local actors to get involved. The second part of my theory argues that participation can enable implementation by affecting school governance and expanding the services provided. The educational reform movement in Kentucky offers an opportunity to test these hypotheses.

Research Methods

Kentucky is a useful case study for the purposes of this research because, first of all, the state's educational reform statute, the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990, is clearly a state-level mandate to localities. The mandate emerged directly from a court decision and subsequent state-level legislation.[40] The fact that this policy is a state-level mandate is helpful because it allows this study to better draw a causal link between policy and participation. If local participation had been instrumental in creating KERA, it would be difficult to assess whether KERA or previous participatory measures have been responsible for participation in the 1990s.

A second reason is that the state legislature has largely complied with the court mandate. Unlike many other states inundated with school finance litigation and court rulings during this time, the Kentucky General Assembly responded in full to the mandate.[41] For the most part it did not try to ignore or circumvent the court's ruling, nor did it try to hamper its impact with piecemeal legislation. In fact, the Kentucky Education Reform Act is heralded as "the most comprehensive, innovative reform legislation ever passed by any state in recent history".[42] This is useful for this study in that it limits the number of possible variables predicting implementation of KERA. When

---

[40] As will be explicated later, in 1989, in *Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc.*, the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled its entire education system unconstitutional and mandated the state to redesign it. The state General Assembly quickly responded to the mandate and soon thereafter enacted the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA).

[41] Deborah A. Verstegen, "A New Wave of School Finance Litigation," *Phi Delta Kappan* 76 (Nov 1994), pp. 243-50. Within just one year, between 1989 and 1990, supreme courts in four states ruled their school finance systems unconstitutional. These rulings ignited school finance litigation throughout the country. Four years later, seven more states had issued rulings on the constitutionality of their education finance systems, and a majority of states had in one way or another become involved in litigation.

[42] Betty E. Steffy, *The Kentucky Education Reform: Lessons for America* (Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), p. xiii.

studying local implementation of this policy, state-level activity will not be as relevant in explaining the extent to which certain initiatives have been implemented, as will be local-level decision making.

A third, related reason for using the educational reform movement in Kentucky as the context of this study is that there are two clearly distinct phases of this story: a pre-policy and a post-policy phase. Because the policy changes occurred at a succinct point along a timeline, I will be able to observe the phase preceding the policy—the 1980s—and the phase immediately following the policy—the 1990s. Both phases are approximately ten years long, and both are distinct because of the policy that clearly separates them. This research design provides variation in my analysis by allowing me to identify changes to KERA during the implementation process.

Another reason for the usefulness of Kentucky's case study is the dual nature of the policy. The policy mandate authorizes tight, centralized control as well as local discretionary authority. It maintains a strong connection to localities through a rigidly-structured hierarchical decision-making process, additional government intermediaries between local school districts and state agencies, and more rules and regulations. For instance, KERA partially controls how much money each school has to spend, how a local district operates, and how teachers teach in the classroom. At the same time, the reform policy gives individual schools more control over their own affairs through, for example, the formation of school councils. The dual nature of this policy allows me to look in depth at how policy has enabled participation and, at the same time, how participation has contributed to the implementation process within localities.

Within the context of Kentucky's educational reform movement, I have conducted research on a case study of a single school district. I decided to limit my case study to one school district because it was simply not feasible for the purposes of an undergraduate honors thesis to study the effects of this reform policy statewide, or to conduct a comparative analysis of two or more school districts. Further, most of the literature on educational reform in Kentucky looks either at the macroimplementation level—focusing on the court decision, legislation, or work of bureaucrats during the implementation process. Or the literature looks at the microimplementation level with a

narrow focus on implementation in the classroom, from an education perspective. Lastly, because this study examines participation in one community over a twenty-year period, there is enough variation even though it is confined to one unit of analysis. During this time new actors are introduced, previous actors disappear, various state- and district-level reform measures are undertaken, and the state and district political environment changes slightly.

I chose Knott County as the school district for the case study for a number of different yet related reasons. One reason was I wanted to choose a district based on one of my independent variables: a district exhibiting community involvement in public educational reforms. I was not aware of the extent of involvement present before choosing Knott County. However, I knew there was at least one individual in the district who was very active in the state-level political movement in the 1980s, through her involvement with the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a statewide authority on education matters and educational reform policy.

A second reason why I chose Knott County for this study is that I did not want to choose a district based on my dependent variable—implementation of the KERA reform measures. At the same time, though, I did not want to choose a district that has failed to show visible improvements since implementation began. Knott County was a nice compromise: the district's improvement scores, from 1993 to 1997, were slightly above the mean improvement score for 'distressed' districts in the state.[43] Using a district that falls within the mean for one of the implementation indicators makes it easier to explain possible obstacles to implementation with the presence of the community participation variable.

A third reason for choosing Knott County concerns the district's socioeconomic status. I am most interested in levels of citizen participation present within low-income communities, for, as enunciated previously, participation at the lowest echelons of the socioeconomic hierarchy differs

[43] "The December 3, 1998 Release of Kentucky Accountability Results for School Districts Accountability Cycle 3 Results (1994-95 to 1997-98)," Available: WWW URL: (http://www.162.114.24.81/kirisresults/AllDistricts.asp). To come up with a mean improvement score for the

starkly from the range and type of participation at the highest echelons. Knott County is a rural district in Appalachia and is labeled as 'distressed' by the state and federal government. According to a report by the Kentucky KIDS COUNT Consortium, as of March 1997, 80% of school-age children in the county were eligible for free or reduced lunches, and as of 1995, the average earning was only $27, 125.[44] Furthermore, according to the 1990 Census, 35.9% of Knott County's civilians 25 years of age or older had no higher than an eighth grade education, 45.1% completed high school, and only 13.6% had completed 4 or more years of college.[45]

Sources

Most of the data used in this study was obtained from interviews I conducted over the course of the past six months. In the summer of 1999, I spent a couple of months conducting research in Lexington, Kentucky. During that time, I interviewed the Executive Director, the Associate Director, and Chair of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. I also interviewed two activists, at the local and state level (both of whom were also longtime members of the Prichard Committee). Furthermore, I interviewed a state-level education administrator and a state-level contractor, whose agency has contributed in a number of ways to the state's educational reform movement. The focus of my study has changed considerably since I conducted these summer interviews, so most of them will not be used directly in the study. Nonetheless, the information I gathered from them has been considerably helpful in adopting my current approach, and some of the data is used indirectly in my analysis.

In the winter of 1999/2000, I returned to Kentucky and visited Knott County in southeastern Kentucky. During my visit to Knott County, I interviewed four parent participants, one longtime community member activist, six educators (four of whom previously taught in the district, one

---

distressed districts, I counted the difference between the 97-98 Index score and the 94-95 Index score of all the districts within the two Appalachian Regions (Region #6 and #8), and then averaged them.

[44] Kentucky KIDS COUNT Consortium, *Kids Count Data Book 1997* (Baltimore, Maryland: the Annie E. Casey Foundation, December 1997).

former and one current principal, and four district-level administrators), and one regional-level administrator (who has also been a longtime active community member). In the spring of 2000, I also conducted follow-up interviews. The data presented in this study is gathered in large part from these twelve interviews and six follow-up interviews.[46] It is their stories and insights that provide the basis for the story I present and the explanations I offer.

In addition to conducting interviews during my visits to Kentucky, I also gathered primary sources, mostly in the form of newspaper articles. I gathered information from 1980s articles on education in statewide newspapers, such as the *Lexington Herald-Leader* and the *Courier Journal*. I also obtained data from relevant articles in the 1980s in Knott County's weekly paper, the *Troublesome Creek Times*. In addition to newspaper archives, the other primary sources I use in this study are mostly in the form of state government documents, such as handbooks, test results, district "report cards," and annual reports.

The secondary sources used for this study are numerous and wide-ranging. I have used a number of the Prichard Committee's publications, which include histories of the work of the Committee since its inception, educational reform policy papers, and KERA critiques and updates. I obtained most of the other secondary sources from political science theoretical literature, public policy literature, and education policy literature.

---

[45] Mike Mullins, Geneva Smith, Ron Daley, and the Knott County History Book Committee, eds., *History and Families, Knott County Kentucky (1884-1994, 110th Anniversary)* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1995), p. 143.

[46] Refer to Appendices A and B.

Chapter One: The 1980s

The story of educational reform efforts in Knott County during the 1980s demonstrates that community participation can exist without a policy-related impetus and that it can make a difference within schools, apart from reform policy. The educational reform policies adopted during this phase were few. Furthermore, interviews suggest that they had little impact on what was happening at the local level—on what teachers were doing in their classrooms, what students were learning, and the life opportunities schools offered their students.[47] Concomitantly, these efforts did little to enable community involvement in the Knott County school system. Despite the lack of institutional support and the presence of formidable barriers, there was some local participation in education. The lack of policy clearly had an impression on this participation, however, in that the number of those participating was small; the type of participation was for the most part individualized, project-oriented, and limited in scope; and the level of coalition building was minimal. Furthermore, the kind of participant seems to have been fairly uniform: all of the participants interviewed already possessed the personal resources and/or the skills needed to participate, and none of them were motivated primarily by self-interest.

Educational Reform Policy

Due to a culture of politics and patronage,[48] similar to those prevalent in most Appalachian counties in Kentucky, reform initiatives were a rarity during most of Knott County's history. In fact, the entire education system in Kentucky has historically been reluctant to adopt school improvements. By roughly the mid-1980s, however, the state and county political climate regarding schooling and educational reform changed somewhat, due in part to what was perceived as the state's inability to

[47] None of the educators or community members interviewed mentioned state or district level policies when discussing reform initiatives undertaken in the schools at that time.

[48] A "culture of politics and patronage" refers to the type of education culture present in many Kentucky counties; a culture characterized by a hierarchical school decision-making structure, powerful superintendents and school boards, hiring of relatives to school positions, localized political influence of school board members, and reluctance of school board members to raise taxes. Also, it should be noted that the term "traditional education culture" will be used synonymously with the term "culture of politics and patronage."

attract new businesses.[49] Leaders as well as the public were beginning to realize the economic implications of a nonproductive education system. Political and corporate leaders knew that something had to be done, otherwise the government would be forced to raise levies on corporations already operating in Kentucky.[50] The public did not favor tax increases; nonetheless, according to surveys, they supported general improvements in schooling.[51] It was the nationwide release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and the concurrent burgeoning influence of statewide civic organizations, like the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, that fostered concerns over the connection of the education system to the state's deteriorating economy.[52]

State-Level Reforms

The greatest concentration of state-level educational reform efforts occurred during Governor Martha Layne Collins' administration, from 1983-87. One of the earliest efforts came after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, when the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce created the Kentuckians for Excellence in Education Task Force, a coalition of state-level legislative, education, business, and labor leaders.[53] The Task Force was responsible for studying the conditions of Kentucky's education system and then making recommendations for reform strategies.[54]

In October 1984, Governor Collins embarked on a traveling tour throughout the state to promote educational reform.[55] The Governor's plan was to visit all one hundred and twenty counties and to recruit parents, teachers, and administrators alike into her campaign for educational reform.[56]

---

[49] Holly Holland, *Making Change: Three Educators Join the Battle for Better Schools* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998), p. xx.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] A brief description of the Prichard Committee's contribution to the educational reform movement during the 1980s will be given in the section on the reform legislation.
[53] Stephen Clements, *The Changing Face of Common Schooling: The Politics of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act (Vol. I&II)*, A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Division of Social Sciences in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Political Science (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago, March 1998).
[54] Ibid.
[55] Sharon M. Reynolds, "Collins to travel state for educational reform," *Lexington Herald-Leader* (28 Oct. 1985), p.1.
[56] Ibid.

This idea originated from a number of other states in the region pushing for public support of mass improvements in the states' education systems.[57]

The following year, during the 1985 special legislative session, Governor Collins' education package finally passed into law, forcing local boards to raise taxes, among other changes.[58] Some of the educational reform measures in the package included an increase in teachers' salaries, a decrease in class size, and the provision of longevity pay rewards to teachers.[59] According to a 1985 *Troublesome Creek Times* article, the bill also gave more control to localities by requiring poorer districts to raise taxes in order to qualify for power equalization and building funds. Knott County Representative Rose contributed to the compilation of the 1985 reform package by proposing an assistant teacher bill that would place an assistant teacher in all classrooms kindergarten through third grade.[60] These legislative efforts were among the major reform initiatives undertaken by state-level actors during the 1980s. Following Governor Collins' administration in 1987, support for and implementation of educational reforms at the state level waned until 1990.

District-Level Reforms

There were also reform efforts undertaken at the district level, although it is not altogether clear whether these efforts were an outgrowth of the momentum generated by the state-level reform efforts. Some new measures were attempted, particularly ones involving parent participation. At the same time, many of the efforts undertaken seem to have been mere continuations of existing projects and programs. An example of an early reform effort was the Knott County Board of Education's approval of a plan in March 1985 to offer an advanced high school diploma, so Knott County Central High School could offer its students college credits.[61]

---

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ron Daley, "Education package passed in special law session: Local board will need to raise taxes," *Troublesome Creek Times* (24 July 1985), p.1.
[59] Ibid.
[60] "Representative Rose has his own plan to decrease classroom size," *Troublesome Creek Times* (2 July 1985), p.1.
[61] Karen Stamper, "New diploma offered," *Troublesome Creek Times* (20 March 1985), p.1.

For the 1985-86 school year a number of programs were proposed to the Board, including: 1) Project Tall, which was designed to urge potential dropouts to stay in school and become more aware of the need for education in today's society; 2) an Academic Challenge Team; 3) a Mock Trial Team; 4) the Close-up Program, which sent one student to Washington, D.C. for a week; and 5) a community cable network system in classrooms.[62] Most of these projects were already offered by the school district. At the start of the 1985-86 school year, the district released a list of ways in which it had tried to improve student assessment scores.[63] Efforts included in-service training for instructors, dissemination of information to parents about ways to improve their children's testing ability, and improvement of the attendance rate.[64]

There were a couple of efforts specifically addressing concerns over the lack of parent participation in the schools. At a planning meeting for the 1985-86 school year, concerns were raised over the problem of communication between parents and schools. A suggestion was made to address this problem by increasing awareness of the school system's Community Relations Committee.[65] A couple of years later, during the 1987-88 school year, the School Community Relations Committee of the local Board designed a survey from a statewide poll, with the purpose of obtaining input from Knott parents.[66] The plan was to give the results of the survey to the central office and principals, who would then analyze them and keep them in consideration when making decisions.[67]

Policy's Impact on Participation

Most of the 1980s reform efforts undertaken by state- and district-level policy makers were limited in their implications. They were not broad reaching or profoundly divergent from previous practices, and relied only minimally on the involvement of individuals at lower levels of the implementation

---

[62] "Board approves hirings for next school year," *Troublesome Creek Times* (24 April 1985), p. 1.
[63] "Testers pleased with improvement," *Troublesome Creek Times* (28 August 1985), p. 1.
[64] Ibid.
[65] "Board approves hirings for next school year", *Troublesome Creek Times* (24 April 1985), p. 1.
[66] "School survey seeks parents' opinions," *Troublesome Creek Times* (10 Feb 1988), p. 1.
[67] Ibid.

process, such as educators, parents, and other community members. None of those interviewed who were educators in Knott County's public schools in the 1980s could recall any educational reform policies, let alone any policies that actually impacted what they did as educators in their schools and classrooms. Also, none of those interviewed who were active community members during this time made any references to policy initiatives. When discussing what provided the impetus to get involved, none of the community members gave policy among the reasons.

It appears, then, that policy was not a predictor of participation in the 1980s. It did not enhance the capacity of community members to participate, nor did it provide incentives or reduce disincentives to participate, nor did it create new platforms for participation. The only way in which the education system impacted participation was through the efforts of a few educators to mobilize community members. There were also other ways in which individuals were spurred to involvement—namely, the salience of the issue, a perceived necessity due to lack of funds and lack of accountability, availability of personal resources, and socialization by family.

Capacity

The 1980s policies did not visibly enhance the capacity of community members to participate in the school system. In fact, they seem to have done nothing to overcome the participatory incapacity of many low-income community members. There are numerous explanations for the inability of these members to participate, one of which is time constraints. In most low-income households, both parents work full-time, a single, working mother raises the children, or a family has many children. Another possible explanation is the lack of transportation; for example, a family may have only one car or one of the parents does not know how to drive. A third explanation is the lack of concern, caused by parents' low levels of education attainment.

Policy makers may not have succeeded in enabling participation by enhancing community members' capacity to participate. Regardless, some members of the community already possessed this capacity, either in the form of personal resources or skills. All the participants interviewed were able to get involved because they possessed at least some personal resources to do so. Their

husbands made enough money to provide sufficiently for their families, so they did not have to work, unlike other mothers in the area, and thus, had the time to get involved. Two out of three of them specifically cited this as an enabling factor in their involvement.

A couple of the participants interviewed also possessed the skills needed to participate in community affairs. Both of these participants had acquired these skills—familiarity with politics and local decision-making processes, the ability to work with others in collective action, and the ability to organize meetings and events—through a childhood socialization process formed by their families. One of the participants, Lois Weinberg, was the daughter of a former governor and a prominent state figure who dedicated his entire professional life to political activity in the state. The other participant, Alice Whitaker, grew up in a family that had founded a community school and a private foundation for the community. Her entire childhood was wrapped up in the affairs of school and community.

Incentives/Disincentives

The reform efforts of the 1980s further did little, if anything at all, to eliminate the many disincentives to participate present within the education system for many years. A primary explanation for their limited impact on actors at the ground level is the strong presence of a culture of politics and patronage at that time. Such a culture was largely responsible for creating the framework within which the system operated. Having developed over many previous generations and continuing into the 1980s, it became a prevailing characteristic of many Kentucky counties.

One element of this education culture was the weak connection between the state government and the local school districts.[68] The Kentucky legislature possessed little control over localities, thus giving local decision-making bodies substantial discretionary authority over their own affairs.[69] In turn, powerful political machines ran many local governments, most of which were

[68] Weak centralized control and a strictly-defined, localized hierarchy most likely originated in federalist structures and then later became defining characteristics of this culture.
[69] Holland, *Making Change*, pp. xvii-xix.

heavily engaged in and influential over the affairs of school districts.[70] For example, in 1960, a legislative investigation discovered that many superintendents and school boards became "political bosses" in their counties.[71] The apparent marriage of local governments and school districts, particularly in Appalachia, stemmed mainly from the districts' role as prime job provider.[72] A result of this disjuncture between state and local government was that state policy makers did little to impact local school systems, attempting few and modest educational reform measures.

Within localities a trademark of the traditional education culture was the hierarchical structure of decision making, with the superintendent and school board occupying the highest echelon of the decision-making process. The politicized power of the superintendent and his board was reflected partially in the fact that the school board elections were hotly contested, corrupt, and absent of an education policy focus.[73] The power dynamics within local school districts were also reflected in the tradition that hiring for school jobs, as well as salaries and placement decisions, were based largely on patronage. The superintendent and school board members could use the local schools as strongholds for their political support. A result of this hierarchical structure of decision making was that the status quo was easily maintained in school districts. This education culture—of little to no pressure from the state, a rigidly-structured decision-making process, and the use of school faculty and staff as political pawns—was not conducive to experimentation or innovation.[74] Thus, similar to state-level policy makers, school district officials rarely adopted reform measures, and when they did such measures were piecemeal.

---

[70] Ibid.; and Timothy Collins in *Tapestry of Conflicts: A Political Economy of Education and Economic Development (Vol. I, II, & III)*, A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Kentucky, Department of Sociology (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1995), p. 873.

[71] Penny Miller, *Kentucky Politics and Government: Do We Stand United?* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 291-92.

[72] Miller, pp. 291-92. According to Miller, in Appalachian districts there exists a mentality of education as a "business enterprise." A reflection of this mentality is that these districts have more "classified workers"—bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and custodians—than other districts in the state.

[73] Ron Daley, "Board races hottest of election," *Troublesome Creek Times* (2 Nov 1988), p. 1; Holland, pp. xvii-xix.

The traditional education culture created a disincentive for community members to participate by exerting a tremendous amount of pressure to conform to existing schooling policies. In Knott County and other rural counties, the school system was one of the—if not the—largest industry in the county.[75] As follows, many members of Knott County were employed by the school district or had a family member working for the district. Thus, many people in and out of the school community did not want to engage in activities or support ideas that could be considered a conflict of interest. According to a 1989 statewide poll, agreeing with the statement that teachers and parents were afraid to speak out against their school boards, fifty-seven percent of Kentuckians recognized how entrenched the education system was in corrupt practices.[76]

Although the conformity of the traditional education culture served as a disincentive to participate for many, this barrier did not affect all community members. In fact, none of the participants interviewed indicated that they were in any other way affiliated with educational politics. The absence of this association permitted them to participate in the school system without having to consider the negative repercussions of doing so.

There were also a number of incentives, distinct from reform efforts by policy makers at the state or district level, that motivated individuals within Knott County to get involved in the school system. When asked why they became involved, all the community interviewees stated, in one way or another, that they believed in the importance of education for their children, and in the importance of involvement in their children's lives and in community affairs. In essence, these individuals became participants despite present and potential obstacles, because they held a conviction of its importance as a parent and as a community member. The salience of these issues—of educational

---

[74] Miller, pp. xxvi-xxix. According to Miller, Kentucky has a "traditionalistic" political subculture, meaning its conception of the commonwealth is paternalistic and elitist and, therefore, is not conducive to sweeping reforms.
[75] Miller, pp. 291-92. Miller also describes this phenomenon in terms of the presence of government: To the present day, local school districts remain the most powerful government agencies in many counties statewide.
[76] Holland, pp. xvii-xix.

reform and civic engagement—seems to have provided the greatest impetus to participate for these community members.

It is also apparent that another incentive to participate was a perceived necessity to become a stakeholder in the system. Even with a desire to be active in their children's schooling and in the community, these members may not have taken the extra step toward active, direct engagement without a further impetus. Such an impetus stemmed in large part from the school system's severe deficit of financial resources. The system was entrenched with financial corruption: individuals with political influence were frequently not subject to the same local tax rates as other residents of the county, and the local school board was reluctant to raise taxes because its elected members were highly sensitive to public opinion.[77] Due to this funding deficit, the schools did not have the programs in place and instructional materials at hand to provide an adequate education for their children. Therefore, in order to see any type of improvements in the children's education, concerned individuals were pushed, so to speak, into implementing projects on their own or seeking funds from external sources.

Another reason why community members perceived a necessity to get involved was a lack of accountability. Some of the parents who wanted to be involved in education in the county were confronted with what seemed to be a lack of accountability on the part of educators and the education system in general. Three out of the four community members interviewed considered the lack of accountability as a major obstacle to improvements in education, and as worrisome considering its potential impact on the academic progress of their own children. Two of these interviewees specifically cited lack of accountability as a driving force behind their active involvement.

Platforms

Although it appears that some of the policy initiatives attempted to provide new means by which to participate in the school system, there is no evidence to suggest that these policies ever created new

platforms on which community members could voice their concerns. All of the ways in which community members got involved were either designed by themselves (individually or in a group), or by the initiatives of individual educators (and not in conjunction with a particular policy initiative). If policy provides a new platform for participation, community members would have to be considered legitimate actors within the system. At this time, though, there were not any systemic initiatives undertaken to turn them into legitimate school participants.

Mobilization

Community members also became involved because of encouragement from educators. A few educators tried to get parents and community members involved in the schools. One such educator was former principal Brady Slone, who says he has always believed that the function of a school is service to its community. As a principal he tried to find out what the community wanted from its school.[78] He claims to have had an "open door policy" that made him receptive to parents. He continually attempted to bring parents to the school and find them a role in the schooling process, and he often planned special activities in order to bring community members together.[79] As an elementary school teacher during this time and as a career educator, Jane Campbell also claims to have always depended on the involvement of outside actors.[80] Because she was teaching in a tightly-knit community, there was a close working relationship with the community and a fairly large group of involved parents.[81]

Participation's Impact on Implementation

Although lacking the support structure for experimentation and innovation, community members did undertake efforts to improve schooling in Knott County. There was a small group of individuals outside of the school community who actively engaged in efforts to improve the county's education system. For the most part, the participation of parents and community members was minimal,

---

[77] Holland, pp. xvii-xix; and Ron Daley, *Troublesome Creek Times* (18 Sept 1985), p. 1.
[78] Interview with Brady Slone (1/5/00).
[79] Ibid.
[80] Interview with Jane Campbell (12/20/99).

localized to the smallest unit of analysis, and channeled through informal mechanisms. However, in a number of respects it had a measurable impact on schooling in the county.

Governance

The participation present in the 1980s had little to no impact on the governance of school practices. In fact, community participants did not get involved in school decision-making processes. The county's superintendent and school board governed the functioning of the school system and any reform initiatives implemented within the schools. Active community members did not even regularly attend board meetings. Having restricted their participation to one school—their child's school—or to an entity outside of the education system, it appears these participants had little to no interaction with administrators or input in administrative decisions.

Provision of Services

Community participants may not have impacted the governance of policy, but they did have a notable impact on the provision of services. These participants provided the schools and community with resources and services that the school system could not or would not supply. There are two broad ways in which community members succeeded in providing needed services: by forming a group and collectively undertaking efforts to improve the schools, and by personally committing to fill a particular void in the community. The former mode of participation indicates that active citizens shared common interests and concerns, and that these concerns were great enough to initiate participation in a collaborative effort. The latter indicates that there were at least a few individuals in the community who believed strongly enough in what they were doing that they were willing to take the risk of bearing the costs of participation alone.

⇒*Group Participation: A Parent-Teacher Organization*

In Knott County in the 1980s, there were a few parents involved in the local parent-teacher organizations (PTO) of their children's schools. Interviewees cited their accomplishments at Emmalena Elementary and Hindman Elementary. A small group of parents actively took part in

---

[81] Ibid.

their school through a PTO at Emmalena Elementary. The activity of their group is a noteworthy example of community participation because its members were heavily invested in their children's lives; held a conviction that they should participate in the schools and be active community members; had sufficient personal resources; and perceived a necessity to organize in order to, in particular, raise funds the school lacked. A couple of the PTO members interviewed initiated their involvement partially because of a lack of accountability, and one of them had a lifetime association with civic institutions and political life.

The two parents who perceived a necessity to act were Josie Cornett and Lois Weinberg.[82] Josie Cornett's active involvement with the school system began when her eldest daughter was in fifth grade in the early-1980s. Her daughter was receiving unsatisfactory grades, and when Ms. Cornett approached the teacher for an explanation of her daughter's poor performance, the teacher was not responsive and merely excused her daughter's academic record. Ms. Cornett did not want to see her other daughter suffer academically due to teacher apathy, as had happened with her eldest daughter, so she decided to participate in the school PTO. Lois Weinberg's involvement began in much the same way: in the mid-1970s, when her first son was four years old, she went to attend his class at Head Start but the teacher told her she would have to schedule a visit. Ms. Weinberg was shocked to discover she needed the teacher's permission to get involved in her son's schooling. Another source of her discontentment was that, at that time, parents' formal communication with the school community was limited to receiving their children's grades and, on occasion, to attending parent-teacher conferences.

Their parent-teacher organization was comprised of a small group of concerned parents. It was such a small group, in fact, that a number of their members served as president of the PTO more than once. As PTO participants, they would consult with the principal and teachers about what they needed in the classroom. Then, they would raise funds for the materials requested (such as air conditioners and blinds for the classroom windows). It was difficult to raise funds, though, because

it was always the same group of locals who contributed to the school, and other schools in the county were also asking for donations. Like most other schools in the county and region, their school had limited financial resources. Therefore, in order to see improvements in educational supplies and in the general learning environment of the school, they were compelled to seek for funds outside the system.

Their local PTO eventually gained access to the classroom by serving as volunteer teacher aides (schools did not have teacher aides at this time).[83] According to Norma Craft, one of the PTO participants, teachers needed assistance with classroom and clerical tasks because they did not have time to care for more than thirty students. The schools did not have good office equipment at that time, so it was very time consuming to perform simple tasks like making photocopies.[84] By assisting teachers with these simpler tasks, parents were indirectly helping the teachers with their instruction because teachers were then able to spend more of their time on instruction in the classroom.

According to Lois Weinberg, despite their fundraising activities and teacher aide services, a more important function of the Emmalena PTO was to raise awareness of the value of parental involvement within the school, and to raise parent participants' own awareness of what was going on in the classroom. They received information about the school by actively communicating with one another, but they received little input from teachers; although, occasionally some of the teachers would come to their meetings and provide a brief update of school events. In addition, the PTO members attempted to expand their membership. They tried to get these parents to participate in big school events, but many parents did not participate. The reasons for the low turnout were manifold: some could not drive, some worked, some had a large number of children, and some did not care.[85]

Although the Emmalena PTO made efforts to raise awareness among educators about parent participation and among parents about their children's education, their impact on the school system

---

[82] Interview with Josie Cornett (12/20/99) and Lois Weinberg (1/5/00).
[83] Interview with Norma Craft (12/21/9).
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

was for the most part confined to their particular school community. The participants did not seem to know what went on outside of their school, with the exception of Lois Weinberg. Norma Craft could not remember ever confronting the superintendent about problems. Having no recollection of interaction between her school and state-level officials, organizations, or other entities, Ms. Craft was also removed from state-level decision makers. Further, there was very little communication amongst PTOs within the county.[86] There were not any countywide meetings of PTOs, so exchanges of information between schools were rare.[87] At one point, one of the county's parents came up with the idea of combining the PTOs in the district. This idea was quickly dismissed, however, because community members decided it would never succeed due to strong rivalries between the schools, concerning funding, sports, and other venues of competition. Due to the absence of a network of local participants, the PTOs and other community groups could not combine their ideas and efforts.

⇒*Individualized Participation*

Of the community participants interviewed, the two who engaged in educational reform efforts through formal, individualized mechanisms were those skilled to participate in local political activities. One of these participants was Lois Weinberg, who was not only a PTO member, but also founder of a learning center for dyslexia. When her first son was in first grade, she and her husband had him evaluated and were told he has a learning difference called dyslexia. In 1979, her son attended an intensive summer school at a center in Louisville that practiced instructional methods for dyslexia. Knowing very little about dyslexia herself, Lois also went for a week to the school for supervisors' training, and she learned how to help with her son's learning. After this session, she decided to attend an after-school tutorial weekly, and it was during these tutorials she learned how to tutor him.

After she developed tutoring skills, Lois Weinberg decided to hold an informational session on dyslexia for parents. Before the session, she asked the parents she knew whether their children

---

[86] Ibid. and interview with Lois Weinberg.
[87] Interview with Lois Weinberg.

were reading at an adequate level, and then invited those with concerns to come to the session. Following the session, she called the parents (fifteen in all) and informed them that their children needed to be screened for dyslexia. The center for dyslexia in Louisville was very supportive, and starting in 1980, Lois began meeting with these parents weekly. Initially she served as both director and acting supervisor of what is today known as the James Still Learning Center. She was the only one in the community who was properly informed and trained. However, other parents eventually attended the training, and she was then able to give her position as supervisor to another parent.[88] In 1985, their group began a summer school, and the center in Louisville came to Knott County to help run the school. At that point many parents attended a session to learn how to screen children. Throughout the 1980s and up until 1990, their group offered after-school and summer programs, and remained completely parent-run.

In addition to Lois Weinberg, Alice Whitaker was another participant during the 1980s. Ms. Whitaker's family has been involved with Knott County's schools since the 1920s, when her Aunt Alice founded a community school called Cordia. Her mother and father were both teachers, and most members of her family were involved in the school in numerous capacities. All their lives were deeply committed to the success of the school and its students, since it was Aunt Alice's philosophy that education was the hope of getting children out of poverty and making a difference in a community. When her family established the Lotts Creek Community School, Inc., a private foundation, a public-private contract was brokered between their community school and the state, allowing the school to remain public and to remain in the community.

The foundation has primarily functioned as a fundraiser, seeking funds from private donors, foundations, and like entities. As director, Alice Whitaker has also tried to provide a social setting for a school in their community, and in doing so, has had to continually block consolidation efforts, which have been a threat to the school's existence for many years. Ms. Whitaker and her family have also worked with the community for years on efforts to block other threats posed to their

community, such as strip mining. Furthermore, as will be explicated in the following chapter, the foundation has a long history of providing various social services for the community, such as home repair, food, and clothing.

Their two stories seem to suggest that, by working outside the education system, individualized participation had a greater impact on educational reform efforts than group participation. These community members who participated through individualized mechanisms provided services to more people, had a positive effect on other potential participants (by mobilizing them and helping them develop skills), and have had more lasting effects on participation. Overall, though, participation's impact on the education system was minimal during the 1980s. Local actors largely initiated their own reform efforts, which contributed to educational improvements in Knott County; however, their activities did not directly impact state-level or district-level policy. These community activists to a certain extent became stakeholders in the education system and in the community more generally, but they did not take on the responsibility of implementing reform policies.

* * *

The story of educational reform efforts and community participation in Knott County during the 1980s tells us that participation did exist even without a policy-formulated impetus. It seems that because participation existed separately from a policy mandate, it was more likely to turn out loosely organized, project-oriented, and individualized. This was a result of the absence of institutionalized structures for outside input and activity, which left those with concerns, and a desire to voice their concerns, few alternatives but to seek out their own means by which to make change. Their choices were not only limited by policy, but also by the lack of a large-scale, collective effort (or "movement").

The 1980s story further illustrates that participation may not have affected school governance but it still had an impact on educational improvements, mainly by providing services that

---

[88] Ibid.

the school system would otherwise not provide. These efforts had a noticeable impact by, for example, raising funds for the schools, offering college scholarships for graduating seniors, and providing special learning services for dyslexic children.

By the end of the decade, the face of education in Knott County had changed, albeit only slightly. Even though community members were able to expand the educational services offered, the services provided by the schools remained wholly inadequate for the children of Knott County. The schools offered only a basic curriculum; there was very little preschool education and no school-age childcare; and funding remained insufficient to pay for needed educational supplies and extracurricular materials. Indeed, in order to see lasting improvements in the education system and in student performance, a more comprehensive, systemic reform initiative would need to be implemented in Knott County's schools.

Chapter Two: Educational Reform in the 1990s

Passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990 led to changes in educational reform policy in Kentucky, and in the level and type of local participation. Policy makers' approach to reform transformed from the detached policies of the 1980s, having little to no effect on localities, to an engaging policy of the 1990s, attempting to involve ground-level actors. Consequently, unlike 1980s policy reform initiatives, KERA has enabled community participation in the educational reform efforts. Participation is still relatively small in number and limited in scope to individual schools; and the type of participant remains fairly uniform. However, because policy defines much of the participation that now exists, participation is no longer as individualized and project-oriented as it was prior to KERA. It also appears that 1990s policy has introduced a few individuals to school participation.

Overall, there are more ways in which community members can participate in reform efforts due to KERA. Yet, it would be a gross exaggeration to assert that active community participation in reform efforts is a defining characteristic of 1990s education in Knott County or in Kentucky more generally. Involvement at the bottom level of the implementation process has likely expanded and the means through which to get involved have certainly changed and grown, but the number of involved actors is still small.

The Court Decision and Mandate

In the early 1980s, a longtime state educator, Arnold Guess, decided to challenge the constitutionality of Kentucky's education system.[89] Early reform efforts had for the most part failed, and the public schools remained inadequate, inequitable, and corrupt. In 1984, Arnold Guess held the first meeting of his Council for Better Education with school superintendents and school finance experts from throughout the state.[90] Those at the meeting agreed that the state was not doing enough for poor districts and that the constitutionality of this seeming failure in legal responsibility should be

[89] Ronald G. Dove, Jr., *Acorns in a Mountain Pool: The Role of Litigation, Law, and Lawyers in Kentucky Education Reform* (Lexington, Kentucky: The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, 1991), p. 5.

assessed.[91] After the Council for Better Education succeeded in gathering support for the lawsuit from 66 of the 177 school districts, Bert Combs, a prominent state political figure and former Governor, agreed to work as head counsel.[92] A year later, in 1985, the Council filed a lawsuit against a number of the state's public figures, including the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, among others.[93] The plaintiffs claimed that public school funding was inadequate and inequitable, and that students in poor school districts were denied due process and equal protection, as guaranteed in the federal and state constitutions.[94]

Following a ruling in favor of the plaintiffs in the Franklin Circuit Court in 1988, the defendants filed for an appeal to the Kentucky Supreme Court.[95] A year later, in *Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc.*, the Supreme Court upheld the Circuit Court's decision and further declared the state's entire education system unconstitutional.[96] In its decision the Court listed nine educational standards with which to comply, including substantial uniformity, equal educational opportunity, and a monitoring system run by the General Assembly.[97] The Court issued a mandate to the General Assembly to comply with these standards while it set out to "re-create [and] re-establish a new system of common schools".[98] The Court decided not to supervise the ways in which the Assembly attempted to address the education system's deficiencies though.[99] Therefore, the legislature had a substantial amount of flexibility in responding to the mandate.

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

The Kentucky Supreme Court decision and mandate were largely responsible for shaping the General Assembly's subsequent educational reform policies. However, the legislature's policy decisions were also affected by years of advocacy work by statewide pro-educational reform

---

[90] Ibid., p. 6.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., p. 9.
[93] Ibid., p. 12.
[94] Ibid., pp. 12-3.
[95] Ibid., p. 20.
[96] Ibid., p. 21.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

organizations—civic, quasi-governmental, and professional. One of the most instrumental of these organizations in pushing forward reform possibilities was the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a citizen's group focusing on primary and secondary school reform. Having been established in the early-1980s and gaining prominence throughout the decade, the Prichard Committee was a strong voice for improvements in Kentucky's public schools. Most of the Committee's work in the 1980s was devoted to generating statewide support for reforms.[100] More specifically, the Committee attempted to directly influence public policy makers, and to mobilize grassroots support for its initiatives.[101]

Due in large part to the Prichard Committee's activities, a political movement was generated in the state.[102] Leading up to the Court decision and Reform Act, the Committee and its allies (including the Chamber of Commerce and various groups within the educational establishment) put and kept education on the agenda. Further, there was a large-scale generation of ideas about how to improve the education system. A culmination of these efforts built a momentum for reform and thus fostered a friendly political climate necessary for the favorable 1989 *Rose* decision. This momentum also continued into the 1990s, fueling the implementation of KERA reform measures.

The Legislation

With the favorable political climate emerging from the Supreme Court decision and, more generally, from the political movement for reform, the Kentucky General Assembly responded quickly and firmly to the Court mandate. Many legislators have since been heralded for their leadership and determination during this period, in which the General Assembly was drafting reform legislation.[103]

---

[99] Ibid., p. 22.
[100] Stephen K. Clements, *The Changing Face of Common Schooling: The Politics of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act (Vol. I&II)*, pp. 307-8.
[101] Ibid.
[102] The notion of a "political movement" generated at this time is confirmed by a number of actors and an author: the executive director of the Prichard Committee (Interview with Bob Sexton, 8/20/99), the director of the Institute on Education Reform at the University of Kentucky (Interview with Dr. Lois Adams-Rogers, 8/31/99), co-founder and co-director of a Lexington-based consulting firm (Interview with Steve Kay, 8/27/99), and Timothy Collins in *Tapestry of Conflicts: A Political Economy of Education and Economic Development*, p. 729.
[103] Dove, *Acorns in a Mountain Pool*, p. 33.

With assistance from national education experts and agencies, the legislature finalized its reform package, and in 1990 it was enacted into law.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 is made up of twelve components, all of which fall within three broad categories: curriculum, governance, and finance.[104] Included in the curriculum provisions is an accountability system in which student performance is assessed and each school is rewarded or aided by the state for its level of student achievement each school year.[105] Prior to KERA there existed statewide student assessment exams, but school districts were not held accountable for their students' performance on these exams. Another creation of the legislation was the Family Resource and Youth Service Centers, which were intended to provide services to every low-income school community.[106] Also included among the provisions are state-defined education goals and school standards, such as graduation requirements, class size and age of compulsory attendance.[107] Additional provisions include increased funding for and enhancement of professional development training, preschool education programs for at-risk youth, the ungraded primary program, increased funding for extended school services, and a commitment to technology in the classroom.[108]

Central to the governance provisions is a reduction in the level of political influence on school operations. Policy makers intended to directly attack the culture of politics and patronage, which stunted educational improvements within schools throughout Kentucky's history, particularly within Appalachian schools. The reform package attempts to de-politicize education by, among other changes, completely restructuring the Department of Education, abolishing the position of Superintendent of Public Instruction, establishing the Office of Education Accountability as a monitor of the implementation process, and strictly enforcing anti-nepotism laws in local boards of

---

[104] *Kentucky Education Reform Act* (Frankfort, Kentucky: Legislative Research Commission, April 1998), pp. 9-10.
[105] Ibid., p. 9.
[106] Ibid., p. 17.
[107] Ibid., pp. 14-7.
[108] Ibid.

education.[109] Arguably the most profound of the governance provisions is the adoption of school-based decision making by all schools since 1996. Each school council is made up of two parents, two teachers, and the principal, and possesses broad-ranging decision-making authority.[110]

The new school finance system, the Support Educational Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) plan, has essentially increased funding for all districts and has made the distribution of funds more equitable across districts. Because of SEEK, school districts now receive the base of their funds from the state rather than from their own tax revenues, as in the 1980s. Each district is guaranteed a certain amount of SEEK funds per pupil based on average daily attendance, and the funding level is adjusted according to various factors, such as the number of at-risk and special education children and transportation costs.[111] In addition, SEEK requires local tax revenues to constitute a certain amount of the total local financial resources.[112] Lastly, included among the finance provisions are increased funds for special programs, such as extended school services and preschool education and statewide salary increases for teachers.[113]

It is clear from the twelve key provisions that the Kentucky Education Reform Act is comprehensive in its approach to improving the state's education system. Such an approach contrasts with the piecemeal reform efforts of state- and district-level policy makers in the 1980s. At that time, educational reform policies adopted "low-impact" initiatives—for example, increasing funds for more instructional supplies and funding teacher aides for classrooms. Any attempts to go beyond these simple reforms failed. What further distinguishes KERA from previous reform efforts in Kentucky and in other states is that it has ushered in a new way of thinking—about schooling, learning, and parental involvement. It introduced Kentuckians to the concept that all children can learn and at high levels, and it has confronted head-on the traditional division between parenting and

---

[109] Ibid., pp. 18-24, 26-7. The anti-nepotism laws include: school board members are not allowed to have relatives employed by the school district, nor are they allowed to influence the hiring of school employees; there are limitations on campaign contributions for school board seats; and there are limitations on superintendents and principals hiring relatives.
[110] Ibid., pp. 24-5.
[111] Ibid., pp. 27-9.

schooling. Also, while establishing a fairly rigid hierarchical decision-making structure, it is committed to realizing local empowerment and, therefore, has granted localities a considerable amount of discretion within the implementation process. Summarizing well the policy makers' intentions, a passage in the legislation states:

> "The General Assembly recognizes that public education involves shared responsibilities. State government, local communities, parents, students, and school employees must work together to create an efficient public school system. Parents and students must assist schools with efforts to assure student attendance, preparation for school, and involvement in learning. The cooperation of all involved is necessary to assure that desired outcomes are achieved. It is the intent of the General Assembly to create a system of public education which shall allow and assist all students to acquire the desired capacities".[114]

KERA represents a fundamental shift in education policy by focusing on shared responsibility among the local community, educators, and the government, and on the achievements of all students. Previous policies were exclusive by legitimizing the involvement of only those directly included in the implementation process (e.g., state officials and educators), and by frequently overlooking the academic progress of students for "greater" considerations (e.g., political interests). On the other hand, the 1990s policy is much more inclusive by recognizing every actor's potential to make a difference in the lives of the children in their communities.

Community Participation

There are four ways in which the 1990s educational reform policy has impacted the level and type of community participation. KERA has firstly enhanced the capacity of local actors to get involved by, among other initiatives, establishing local networks and helping develop participants' skills. It has secondly provided the impetus to get involved by reducing or eliminating existing disincentives, such as the pressure to conform, and by providing new incentives, by disseminating information for example. KERA has further enabled participation by providing institutional platforms on which to get involved in schools. Lastly, policy has impacted participation by mobilizing community

---

[112] Ibid., pp. 29-30.
[113] Ibid., p. 32.

members. As a mobilizing agent, policy has redefined the role of outside actors and educators have reached out to the community, seeking their input in school decision-making processes.

Capacity

Prior to 1990 policy did little, if anything, to enhance the capacity of local actors to participate. In fact, the small number of participants were already capable actors: they possessed some participatory skills and personal resources to get involved. Furthermore, many community members at that time were not capable of participating because of their low-socioeconomic status. Given that low-income individuals are far less likely to participate in the democratic process than other potential actors, however, we would not expect this particular barrier to be absent in the 1990s. Many community members remain incapable of involvement because of a lack of personal resources. Some of the reasons why they lack these resources include: both parents in a family work, they work long or irregular hours, they have large families, and they lack the transportation to get to and from school activities. KERA has yet to provide sufficient means by which community members can overcome these and other related socioeconomic barriers.

Although KERA has been unable to provide low-income individuals with sufficient personal resources, it has been more successful in enhancing the capacity of community members to participate by creating local networks and by helping participants' develop participatory skills. One of the less obvious ways in which the policy has enhanced the capacity of participants is by establishing links between entities at the local level and beyond. For instance, in addition to providing new means by which to get involved, the Family Resource Centers have served as links within a broader network of local actors. Participants' influence on community affairs has thereby enhanced.

The presence of a Family Resource Center in Alice Whitaker's school community provides an example of how the Centers can enhance capacity by linking local actors together. According to Alice Whitaker, their school's Center has improved the ways in which her foundation, the Lotts

[114] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

Creek Community School, Inc., serves the community and its school.[115] Ms. Whitaker claims that funding of the Center was one of the best things that has happened to the foundation, even though funding for the Center is minimal. The foundation has always provided social services for those in need, but the Center has enabled it to reach farther into the community.[116] Essentially, the Center provides staff and volunteers to do things they could not have done otherwise. For instance, the Family Resource manager contacts families in need and finds resources for them. It is the collaborative effort between the foundation and the Family Resource Center that has better enabled Alice Whitaker's school community to cope with recent rising social service needs.[117]

The implementation of Family Resource Centers has further enabled participation by helping participants develop skills in organizing and networking. One of the community participants throughout the 1990s, Sandy Hudson, whose story will be detailed in a later section, continued to be actively involved in the schools after having established a Center at her son's school. She was able to extend her involvement because state officials helped her develop participatory skills while she wrote a grant proposal for the Center.[118] According to Ms. Hudson, state officials were helpful throughout the proposal writing process, and even lent her assistance when she established a childcare agency a number of years later.[119]

Incentives/Disincentives

Due in large part to the conformity of the traditional education culture, there were few incentives to participate in the 1980s, and policy did little to lower the existing disincentives. Incentives present at this time did not spring from policy initiatives, but mainly originated from the individual participants themselves. For example, people got involved because they believed in the importance of educational excellence or they thought it imperative giving the deteriorating state of education. In

---

[115] Interview with Alice Whitaker (1/6/00).
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid. Alice Whitaker attributes the rise in social service needs to the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation.
[118] Interview with Sandy Hudson (1/6/00).
[119] Ibid.

contrast, one of the aims of the 1990s policy has been to reduce and even eliminate many of these disincentives, thus giving individuals more reasons to participate. One way in which KERA has provided incentives is by weakening the most pervasive effects of the traditional education culture—namely, the disproportionate share of power held by local superintendents and school boards, financial corruption, and lack of accountability.

An example of how KERA has alleviated the effects of the culture of politics and patronage is the dismantling of the hierarchical structure of decision making, within which superintendents and school boards governed school districts like "benevolent dictators." This was accomplished by, among other provisions, the strict enforcement of anti-nepotism laws and the implementation of school-based decision making, which has transferred decision-making authority from the district level to the school level. As Superintendent James Pack contends, the Knott County School Board now implements state laws and regulations, and serves as an advisor on district matters.[120] The Board no longer functions as a decision-making body though. By leveling the decision-making process, community members and other actors at the local level do not feel as much pressure to conform.

Another related way in which KERA has provided more incentives to participate is by advancing a cultural shift toward more community participation in the schooling process. As illustrated in the 1980s story, some members of the school system opened the doors of their schools and classrooms to the community. Nonetheless, there does appear to be, at minimal, a slight enhancement of the education system's receptivity to outside input since the enactment of KERA in 1990. Among the ten interviewees who have been actors during the 1990s, six of them (three parents and three educators) state specifically that such a shift has occurred within the past decade.[121] In the words of active parent participant Josie Cornett, since the enactment of KERA parents have been allowed "through the door" and are more aware that they can voice their opinions in schools. Two

[120] Interview with Superintendent James Pack (12/21/99).

of those interviewed (one parent and one educator) thought the opposite—that KERA has actually been detrimental to community participation.[122] And the other two, both of whom are educators, were neutral, holding the view that KERA has not impacted participation either way.[123]

There is other evidence, albeit not abundant, that points to the current cultural shift in education norms. Surveys have indicated that since the enactment of KERA the public's regard for the education system has risen.[124] Also, according to these surveys, parents are now more knowledgeable about the changes taking place in their children's schools than they were at the earlier stages of implementation.[125] Lastly, there has been a change in educators' and the general citizenry's beliefs about learning. For example, many more people now agree with the statement that "all children can learn and most at a relatively high level".[126]

It is important to note that even if a cultural shift is currently taking place, it is not solely an outgrowth of the educational reform initiatives of the 1990s. At the local level, parents and other community members have been involved in educational reform efforts for years. Although their efforts have been few in number and limited in scope, they have impacted the approach other parents have subsequently adopted in their children's schooling. The presence and undertakings of community members like Lois Weinberg in Knott County have sent a message to other parents that it is their right and responsibility to engage in their children's education.[127] From the very beginning, Lois Weinberg has expressed to parents that they should not fear professional educators but, instead, should put pressure on them.[128] By not only encouraging other community members to participate

---

[121] Interviews with Lois Weinberg, Josie Cornett, Sandy Hudson, Superintendent Pack, Principal Frieda Mullins (1/4/00), and Shannon Bailey (1/5/00).
[122] Interview with Jane Campbell (12/20/99) and Alice Whitaker.
[123] Interview with Roger Martin (12/23/99) and Sandy Bailey (12/23/99).
[124] Jane Clark Lindle, Joseph Petrosko, and Roger Pankratz, eds., *1996 Review of Research on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA)*, Prepared by the University of Kentucky/University of Louisville Joint Center for the Study of Educational Policy, for the Kentucky Institute for Education Research, May 1997.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Interview with Lois Weinberg and Josie Cornett.
[128] Interview with Lois Weinberg.

but also attempting to legitimize their participation, Ms. Weinberg and others have made the school community more receptive to input from parents and other community members.

Policy has created a third incentive to participate by disseminating information to local actors on what is changing within the education system, why education matters, why it is important for them to get involved, and how they can get involved. For example, according to Lois Weinberg, KERA has had a definite impact on her involvement with the school system by heightening awareness among schools and parents of children's reading levels.[129] Ms. Weinberg claims that since the implementation of KERA and due to the accountability system, in which each child is included in measuring the performance of a given school, teachers have gradually become more communicative with parents about how their children are performing.[130] More parents are therefore receiving information from teachers about their children's achievements and difficulties. In turn, this has impacted the services Lois Weinberg provides at her center for dyslexia because parents of younger children are now coming into the center and asking for assistance.[131] Furthermore, due to KERA's comprehensive approach to education, the center has been more conscientious about compensating for its kids' other learning difficulties besides reading skills, such as writing skills.

A breaking down of the traditional education culture, a shifting of cultural norms to broader receptivity, and a wider availability of information have abated many of the disincentives present in the 1980s and, thus, have created new incentives for community members to participate in the 1990s. However, many of the disincentives associated with the previous education system remain. The separation of parenting and schooling is perhaps one of the greatest obstacles to community participation in Knott County. As Principal Frieda Mullins contends, despite KERA's efforts to open school doors to the community, schools are still unable to fully integrate community involvement into their educational programs.[132] This is because community members do not feel

---

[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] This is a good indication that parents are discovering their children's learning differences earlier.
[132] Interview with Principal Mullins.

like they have been invited to participate in the school system. According to Principal Mullins, many believe it is inappropriate to "interfere" with teachers' jobs and, thus, do not think they have a right to converse with educators.[133] Furthermore, as both Principal Mullins and Regional Coordinator Shannon Bailey maintain, even if community members were willing to participate, many do not know how they fit into the school system. If they are parents, they may not be cognizant of the fact that participating in their children's schooling can have a positive, measurable impact.[134]

Another remaining barrier to participation is the lack of information. Paradoxically, KERA has created more incentives to participate by disseminating information but has inhibited participation by not making enough information available. Similar to educators, the public has not been very enthusiastic about KERA.[135] An explanation for this is that many Kentuckians simply do not understand what it entails. One of the problems of implementation has been in educating the public about what KERA means for public schooling.[136] For instance, both Knott County Superintendent Pack and Business Administrator Roger Martin observed that the public still does not realize a decentralized shift has occurred within the district.[137] Many community members still approach the School Board to perform certain tasks it no longer has the authority to perform.

As a result of this ignorance, much blame for students' low levels of achievement has been directed toward the reform measures. For example, many parents approach Lois Weinberg at the James Still Learning Center and tell her that their kids can not read because of KERA.[138] She responds to their complaints by reminding them that their kids could not read before KERA, and then tries to explain to them the implementation process. Frieda Mullins hears similar negative murmurs

---

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid. and interview with Shannon Bailey.
[135] Lindle et al., pp. 296-99. Although engagement in the learning process has multiplied, general support for the reforms is not high and has been slipping since the legislation was adopted. From 1990 to 1996, general approval of the reform measures decreased by nearly 25%.
[136] The speedy implementation of the policy after its enactment has exacerbated this problem, in that the public has had little time to make fair assessments of it.
[137] Interviews with Superintendent Pack and Roger Martin.
[138] Interview with Lois Weinberg.

from community members, who say that KERA does not teach the basics or that high school students are graduating without the ability to read.[139] These problems were present in the school system long before KERA, and parents are at least partially blaming KERA because they do not understand the changes it has brought to the schools. Another reason why they may criticize KERA is if they had negative experiences with the reform initiatives or have acquired unfavorable information about them. KERA's implementation has faced numerous setbacks, after all, and has consequently fallen short of many people's expectations.

Another reason why KERA has not been able to overcome existing disincentives to participate is the lack of a sense of urgency. Prior to KERA one of the main reasons why many community participants got involved was because the schools did not have the funds to provide adequately for its students. KERA has weakened this perceived necessity through its financing scheme, which has increased funding for all districts. Although outside actors are not as pressured to compensate for schools' deficiencies, due to the increase in funding, more funding has made other reform measures possible. Furthermore, local actors now have a larger responsibility in implementing these measures. KERA's financing scheme has, therefore, also had a positive impact on community participation.

Prior to KERA, community participants sensed an additional urgency to act because of the school community's seeming lack of accountability. This is not as strong of an impetus to participate though. In theory, KERA has made schools more accountable to the state as well as to their communities. The 1990 reform legislation created the Office of Education Accountability, which works to ensure that schools are implementing the reforms based on state guidelines.[140] Discretionary authority at the local level is therefore limited: the state sets parameters within which local schools can operate.

---

[139] Interview with Principal Mullins.
[140] *Kentucky Education Reform Act: A Citizen's Handbook*, pp. 26-7.

There are also more institutional structures present within the education system that encourage local schools to be more accountable to their communities, as illustrated in KERA's approach to the special education program. According to Sandy Bailey, Knott County's Director of Special Education, prior to 1990 once a child was classified as "disabled" only that child's teacher was responsible for her or him.[141] Following the enactment of KERA, though, statewide student assessment scores have become critically important to schools because of the accountability system.[142] Because the accountability system assesses all students and registers all scores, special education kids are now more fully included in the schooling agenda.[143] Thus, each school is playing a bigger role in the academic achievement of its special education students, and there are more ways in which parents of these kids can appeal to the schools to provide them with special assistance.

New Platforms: Family Resource Centers and School-Based Decision Making

Attempting to realize their goal of local empowerment, the designers of KERA created two institutional platforms on which outside actors could actively engage in the school reform initiatives. These new platforms have contributed significantly to the formation of an institutionalized support structure for community participation. Such a structure was almost completely absent prior to KERA. In fact, throughout the 1980s there was generally very little legitimization of involvement by outside actors. Thus, KERA has helped legitimize their involvement by creating new platforms for participation that community members are not only able, but also encouraged, to use for their advantage.

One of these institutional platforms is the Family Resource and Youth Service Centers.[144] The Centers have two related functions: to serve their communities' needs and to engage their communities in the schools. In the words of a Regional Coordinator of the Family Resource Centers,

---

[141] Interview with Sandy Bailey.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] This reform measure will simply be referred to as Family Resource Centers and will not explicitly include the Youth Service Centers. The Youth Service Centers are merely the high school equivalent of the Family

the ultimate goal of this reform initiative is to make "the community and the school seamless for the child."[145] The Centers organize a wide array of activities such as workshops on the job market, sex education, safety, and childcare, as well as "gambling nights" with fathers and family album making sessions. Most Centers also coordinate regular visits with parents at their homes, some administer childcare, and some hire parent employees.[146]

During the initial stages of implementation, the Family Resource Centers were funded on a competitive basis.[147] Thus, each school community had to write a grant proposal to the State Department in order to establish a Center at their school. Alice Whitaker was one of the community members who wrote a grant proposal for her community's school. In writing the grant proposal, Ms. Whitaker not only contributed to the creation of their school's Center, but she was also instrumental in deciding how their Center would operate by choosing who would serve as the manager, among other tasks.[148] She believes choosing the manager was a crucial step toward successful implementation of this reform initiative, because their manager has largely shaped the Center—by his particular personality attributes and knowledge of the community and its people.[149] Due in part to its smaller size, their Center is run differently than others in the county: the office of the Center's manager is in his truck and he spends a good deal of his time in homes. Their school's philosophy is that the Center should do whatever needs to be done for the community.

The call for grant proposals during the initial stages of Family Resource Center implementation led to greater engagement with the school system among actors like Alice Whitaker, who was already actively participating through a formal, institutionalized structure. The call for grant proposals also brought actors into the implementation process who otherwise may not necessarily have been formally involved. One such actor is Sandy Hudson, whose involvement with

---

Resource Centers, and the information gathered for this study only makes references to the Family Resource Centers.

[145] Interview with Shannon Bailey.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Interview with Alice Whitaker.

the school system began ten years ago when her son attended Carr Creek Elementary. Information about Family Resource Centers became public and the district requested grant proposals. Out of her own initiative she decided to write the proposal for her son's school, and with the help of state officials during the writing process, the school eventually established a Center.

Another local actor who became directly involved in the KERA implementation process through the grant writing process is Shannon Bailey. Being a longtime activist in low-income communities and following a short teaching career, Mr. Bailey indirectly impacted the school system in the 1980s by helping out with a number of school projects.[150] For example, he worked with the Job Training Partnership Act, which began a summer employment program for low-income youth. He was also a regular attendee of Prichard Committee meetings when the Committee was trying to gain grassroots support for reform throughout the 1980s. Then, when KERA was first instituted, as a parent he wrote a proposal for a Family Resource Center at one of his children's schools. After writing the proposal, the school council reviewed it and made recommendations, and now the school has a Center.

In addition to the Family Resource Centers, the other KERA strand that has provided an institutional platform for participation is school-based decision making (SBDM). SBDM was designed specifically to encourage parent involvement in the schools. This reform measure requires two teachers, two parents, and the respective principal to serve as representatives on a school council. The two parents in Knott County who were interviewed and who served as representatives on their children's councils were not newcomers to local activism, as was Sandy Hudson. Rather, they were among the small group of community members who had been directly and actively engaged in the education system for many years. For the most part, they had already legitimized their involvement in community affairs, obtained sufficient skills, and motivated themselves to get involved in spite of present and potential disincentives. The presence of school councils in the

[149] Ibid.
[150] Interview with Shannon Bailey.

education system did not, therefore, initiate their involvement with reform efforts. It did provide another platform on which their voices could be heard, however.

Josie Cornett was one of these parents and she served on her daughter's school council from 1994-95. When she joined the council, she was insufficiently prepared to serve as a representative.[151] When the council met, she thought the members were supposed to make recommendations for the school. Instead, they were making decisions and dealing with problems on a very narrow basis—problems that could have been dealt with in classrooms by teachers. Further, during the decision-making process she received substantial outside pressure to make certain decisions.[152] Ms. Cornett's experience as a parent representative on the school council made her realize how political school-based decision making is and, consequently, how difficult it is to bring about change in local schools.[153]

Lois Weinberg also served on a school council from 1994-95, and maintains that serving as a parent representative was the hardest and most thankless job she has ever had.[154] It was a real challenge for her to even find out when and where the meetings were being held. In addition, midway through the first year, the other parent representative confessed he did not believe in site-based decision making and thereafter stopped attending the meetings. Another example of the frustrations of this experience was when the council argued over every detail of extracurricular spending proposals.[155] This was only one of many instances in which the council was consumed with micromanagement. According to Ms. Weinberg, despite these difficulties, the council did experience some minor successes. Following the ideas of the Prichard Committee, she successfully pushed along an initiative to make the school environment more welcoming to parents and visitors. Regardless of this and other minor successes, though, Ms. Weinberg contends that the council was generally ineffectual in bringing about change. This was due in part to the absence of administrative

---

[151] Interview with Josie Cornett.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Interview with Lois Weinberg.

leadership within the school.[156] She also attributes the council's shortcomings to the many teachers who wanted change but who were divided over curriculum and other similar issues. Overall, this experience taught her a lesson similar to that of Josie Cornett's—that it is an overwhelming task to bring about change in schools.[157]

Mobilization

Although none of the community interviewees mentioned educators' efforts to mobilize as a reason for their participation, it is clear that some educators are making efforts to bring the community into their schools and classrooms. There was a similar situation in the 1980s, in which none of the community interviewees mentioned the efforts of educators to involve them in educational reform efforts, yet there were at least a few educators who were clearly trying to mobilize community members to participate.

The work of Frieda Mullins as principal at Jones Fork Elementary illustrates well the extent to which educators can mobilize community members, and what this means to participation more generally. A number of interviewees, educators and community members alike, specifically praised Principal Mullins for transforming Jones Fork from a low-performing school to one of the highest performing in Knott County. Frieda Mullins contends that one of her goals as principal is to connect the school with the community, and vice versa. From the very beginning, she has actively sought community members to get involved in school activities.[158] Some of these activities complement the KERA reform measures, some do not.[159] For instance, when KERA was first implemented, her school held parent workshops on the ungraded primary program. Currently, the school organizes curriculum nights, in which parents of students in the primary grades come to the school and work with their kids on science and math projects. There are also some community members who

---

[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Follow-up interview with Frieda Mullins.
[159] Ibid.

participate in one-day activities, such as working parent visits on vocational day. In addition, the school has two community members who regularly volunteer in the school building.

Frieda Mullins' school has continually made an effort to reach out to its community, but Principal Mullins can not recall community members ever initiating school activities on their own.[160] Sometimes teachers actively seek parental involvement in their classrooms, and this usually receives a positive response from parents. On occasion, community members adopt an activity as their own but only if first initiated by the school.[161] Furthermore, Principal Mullins contends that it has not been that difficult to get parents and others involved in small projects or one-day events, but she has not been as successful in getting them to commit to more long-term projects. For instance, she has thus far not been able to get parents to serve on a committee for curriculum development (a KERA initiative). She has also not been able to form a productive task force made up of parents and educators to address needed improvements in math and science in their school.

In addition to the difficulties in mobilizing community members, as explicated in Frieda Mullins's story, there have also been related difficulties in encouraging educators to bring these outside actors into the KERA implementation process. Although some educators have clearly taken advantage of the opportunities KERA has presented, many have been reluctant to engage in the implementation process. Many educators view the reform efforts as an imposing mandate from the state and, thus, are unwilling to allow the reforms to impact what they do in their schools and classrooms.

For most people and particularly for educators, KERA represented too much change too quickly.[162] Teachers and administrators were not used to parents actively participating in their kids' schooling, because such participation was a contradiction of the school tradition.[163] They were also not familiar with nor favorable to the idea of an accountability system, in which educators are

---

[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Holland, *Making Change*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.
[163] Ibid., p. 5.

responsible for their students' performance.[164] Due to these and other changes, which diverged profoundly from traditional practices, many teachers who had been in the profession for a long time retired early because they were unwilling to change.

Educators who remained in the profession and those who just entered were suddenly thrown into many roles and responsibilities, and were often not adequately prepared to fulfill them. Even a teacher like Frieda Mullins, who has always been very enthusiastic about KERA and the primary program in particular, thought implementation of the primary program was a tough transition.[165] She did not think there was enough time to prepare, and was not impressed with the training she attended. Therefore, she was unable to accomplish what she had set out to, and the initial stages of implementation were not as smoothly run as they could have been.[166]

A consequence of the educators' lack of support is that parents and other community members have not and will not be mobilized to get involved in the elements of the reform policy that could directly benefit from outside actors' input. As those closest to the students and thus to a majority of the community, educators could have a profound impact on community participation in the implementation process. It is not possible for them to have such an effect, though, when they are not engaged in the process themselves.

Continued Involvement

In addition to enabling community participation, KERA has also been able to extend individuals' involvement. For instance, implementation of the Family Resource Centers not only brought parents into the reform efforts, but it also served as a stepping stone to involvement beyond the Centers' implementation. Several years after Sandy Hudson wrote the grant proposal for her son's school, she realized that school-age childcare was not available in the county because it was not feasible for the Family Resource managers to offer it.[167] Thus, having already legitimized her active involvement

---

[164] Ibid.
[165] Interview with Frieda Mullins.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Interview with Sandy Hudson.

with the education system and having attained at least some participatory skills, she decided to establish an agency to subcontract to the county. Many people in the community discouraged the idea, but from the very beginning she received substantial assistance from state officials, as she had while writing the grant proposal.[168] Family Resource managers and several parents throughout the county were also very interested in and supportive of her efforts to create a school-age childcare program. According to Ms. Hudson, these people were helpful because they knew that the schools would not deal with the problem. She contends that schools often have a difficult time providing after-school childcare because of liability and other similar issues.

Through her initiative and with the help of other stakeholders, Sandy Hudson established an agency, the 4Cs Foundation (Foundations for Children's Futures, Inc.). As director of the agency, she continues to work regularly with state-level officials in licensing, the food program, and the education system.[169] She hopes her involvement with the agency will eventually lead to even further involvement with the state's education system, in a position at the state level planning and implementing childcare programs.

Another example of KERA's impact on extending community involvement is Shannon Bailey's employment at the Regional Service Center, following his involvement with the local Family Resource Center. His formal participation in the local schools has been limited because of anti-nepotism laws (his wife is a central office administrator in the district, thus he can not work directly for the district).[170] However, for the past four years he has served as Regional Coordinator of the Family Resource Centers. As Coordinator he serves as a liaison between state capitol and local schools, and oversees the Centers' expenditures. Every year each Center is required to take a survey of its community, assess its needs, and then rewrite its program accordingly. Their proposals eventually come to him for approval.

---

[168] Ibid.
[169] More details of Sandy Hudson's 4Cs Foundation will be provided in the following chapter on participation's impact on KERA's implementation.
[170] Interview with Shannon Bailey.

Because Mr. Bailey has been a longtime community activist, it is not altogether clear how much his involvement with the grant proposals led to his current position at the Regional Service Center. It is clear, however, that Mr. Bailey has maintained active and direct engagement with the education system throughout the 1990s, even if such engagement is more administrative than grass-roots. Furthermore, he decided to return to a formal mode of participation after a long absence. Mr. Bailey does not believe KERA led him to adopt his current role;[171] nonetheless, KERA is responsible for the way in which he is currently participating in educational reform efforts.

* * *

The story of educational reform in the 1990s suggests that the Kentucky Education Reform Act enabled community participation, primarily by doing what policies of the 1980s failed to do. KERA has had the greatest impact on participation by weakening old barriers and creating new incentives to participate. Prior to KERA there were many reasons why community members may not have had a reason to participate—namely, pressure to conform, the traditional separation between parenting and schooling, and a lack of information. After the initial stages of KERA implementation, policy confronted these barriers by helping dismantle the politicized school systems, ushering in a cultural shift that recognizes the interconnectedness of home and school, and disseminating information about why education and participation are important. There are now more incentives to participate. However, the culture of politics and patronage has not ceased to exist, the cultural shift is slowly coming to fruition, and most people remain uninformed about the reforms and their potential role in them.

KERA has had a significant impact on participation by providing institutional platforms for community involvement. Prior to KERA, policy failed to provide an institutional support structure for community involvement. There were not any institutional platforms for outside participants, and consequently, participants themselves determined the terms and content of their involvement. This

[171] Follow-up interview with Shannon Bailey.

has changed significantly due to KERA, because now much of the participation is shaped by these new institutional platforms.

The 1990s reform policy has further enabled participation by enhancing the capacity of potential participants. The causal link between policy and capacity is not as clear as it is for the first two ways in which KERA has impacted participation. This is due in large part to the fact that many members of Knott County remain unable to participate due to a lack of personal resources---a reason associated with low-socioeconomic status. However, KERA has better enabled community members to participate by establishing a network of local actors not previously in existence. There is also evidence suggesting that the reform initiatives helped participants develop skills to participate, which then led to further involvement. This is of particular importance in a community, like Knott County, where citizens generally lack the basic skills of organizing, working in collaborative efforts, and communicating with government agencies.

Policy has fourthly impacted participation by mobilizing individuals to act. The extent to which policy has functioned as a mobilizing agent is not entirely clear, but it appears that educators have enabled participation in one way or another, as they did prior to KERA. It is likely, though, that KERA has given educators more reasons to bring community members into their schools, for more projects are being implemented, more funds are available, and more educators are receptive to outside input.

KERA further contrasts with previous reform policies in that it has led some community participants to continue their involvement even after the implementation of a particular reform initiative. In the 1980s, the community interviewees were among the participants who were heavily engaged in reform efforts, and who were committed to long-term involvement. It was not policy that committed them; rather, it was the various initiatives, either individualized or group-oriented, that they undertook themselves. With greater skills and additional new means by which to participate, community members today are more likely to stay involved than to end their involvement with a particular project.

Chapter Three: Reform Policy Implementation

The story of the Kentucky Education Reform Act and community participation in the 1990s is not complete without looking at the implementation of the reform measures and asking whether participation has helped promote the implementation process. The case study of Knott County gives us reason to believe that community participation has enabled the implementation of KERA in two broad ways. First, participation has affected school governance by flattening the decision-making process. This appears possible because one of the KERA strands requires parental participation in school decision-making processes. Second, community participation has produced a broader range of educational services. Similar to the 1980s, participation continues to have its greatest impact on reform efforts by providing services that state or local governments do not offer. The breadth of KERA's objectives makes participation all the more critical for enactment.

KERA's objectives are broadly defined within three categories (governance, curriculum, and finance), and they include a host of reform initiatives that address these three aspects of schooling. The initiatives we will look at to better understand participation's impact on KERA implementation are school-based decision making (SBDM), a governance provision, and the Family Resource Centers, a curriculum provision. It is important to note that these are among the non-bureaucratic initiatives of the reform, the initiatives that directly sought outside involvement. We will also look at some of the bureaucratic programs, though, to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the previous and potential impact of community participation. Further, the community participants' influence on educational reform efforts can not be fully understood by looking alone at the implementation of the KERA strands, for much of their influence has been made indirectly, through their own initiatives. These initiatives can broadly be understood as curriculum initiatives and include Lois Weinberg's James Dill Learning Center, Alice Whitaker's Lotts Creek Community School, and Sandy Hudson's 4Cs Foundation.

Governance

School-based decision making has been fully implemented in Knott County, resulting in a more level governing structure within each school and district. Not only are a greater number of local actors able to exert more influence on school decision-making processes, but also the distribution of this decision-making authority has become more equitable. This contrasts sharply with previous rules of governance, which promoted a hierarchy by giving the superintendent, school board, and school principals exclusive decision-making authority. Although the implementation of this reform measure has produced a more level decision-making process, neither educators nor parents rated school councils favorably. All the educators criticized this reform measure, except for the elementary school principal, Frieda Mullins, who reported success with her school's council thus far.[172] Similarly, the two community members who served as parent representatives on school councils had negative feelings about the reform measure.[173]

Among the complaints of these educators and parents was politicking within the school councils. They claim that politics has moved from the district level to the school level with the implementation of school-based decision making. Instead of pressuring the school board to make certain decisions, individuals now pressure school council representatives to make decisions favorable to them. Another complaint is the variation in implementation. School communities have different priorities and operate their school councils accordingly, so that, for example, some councils deal effectively with curriculum issues and other councils focus on extracurricular programs. A third criticism of school-based decision making is micromanaging. Councils have become notorious for inefficient decision making by detailing and breaking down every policy consideration. There were also a couple of educators who criticized the school councils as illegitimate decision-making bodies.[174] The basis of this criticism was that only professional educators possess the knowledge and skills to appropriately make decisions affecting the entire school. A final criticism was of the

[172] Interview with Frieda Mullins.
[173] Interviews with Lois Weinberg and Josie Cornett.

limitations in disseminating information about how school councils should run. Confusion about the authority of school councils has led to conflicts between the councils and the principal.[175]

There are undoubtedly barriers to the successful implementation of school-based decision making, and until these barriers are more effectively addressed, the impact of parent representatives on school decision-making processes will not be maximized. Nonetheless, council members still have an effect on school governance. In fact, they possess much of the authority once held by the superintendent, school board members, and principals. This authority includes making decisions about hiring, funding allocations, curriculum, extracurricular programs, and a host of other consequential school matters.

Provision of Services

One of the greatest ways in which participation has enabled service implementation is through involvement with the Family Resource Centers. Nearly all the educators and parents interviewed praised the Family Resource Centers in Knott County. Local actors cited more parental involvement in their children's lives and schooling as a key reason for the Centers' success. Another related reason they offered was that the Centers operate differently, according to the needs of their respective school communities. Thus, they are often effective liaisons between kids' homes, schools, and school-based agencies. A third reason is that they help teachers deal with at-risk youth, and focus on the academic performance of these kids, further assisting teachers in the classroom.

The Centers received favorable marks for the role community involvement has played in its implementation. Despite the respondents' positive opinion of the Centers, the Regional Coordinator of the Family Resource Centers gave only five of the nine Centers in Knott County a positive rating. According to the Regional Coordinator, one of the Centers is currently functioning exceptionally well and four are functioning above average. The other four Centers run at or below average, and one of these is barely running. Shannon Bailey contends that in the instances when the Centers are

---

[174] Interviews with Brady Slone and Roger Martin.
[175] Interview with Brady Slone.

not providing services to the community and its students as intended, the members of that particular school community have not invested the time and energy to make this reform measure work. For the Centers to operate as the designers of KERA envisioned, community members must tailor the Centers to fit community needs. This requires at least a few individuals within the community to become actively engaged in the implementation process.

Participation has further enabled policy implementation by providing services that the education system has not or cannot provide. Efforts undertaken by actors like Lois Weinberg, Alice Whitaker, and Sandy Hudson have been integral to KERA's implementation in Knott County, because they are making changes within the district that the state or local governments would unlikely do otherwise. Lois Weinberg's center for dyslexia, the James Still Learning Center, was founded in 1990 and currently works with an average of ten kids per month, covering seventeen counties. The Center lacks money to advertise and to expand its scope; however, parents' perceptions of their children's success have given the program credibility and a wide-reaching reputation.[176] The Center also actively engages parents in their children's learning. As director of the Center, Lois Weinberg works closely with parents; and parents currently participate in the Center's after-school reading program.[177] These efforts to include parents have helped bridge the traditional divide between parenting and schooling.

Parental involvement in the creation of the James Still Learning Center has had a number of other effects on education in Knott County. One effect is a raise in schools' awareness of their legal obligations to kids who learn differently.[178] Knowing their legal responsibilities to non-traditional students, the school community is now more willing to provide special services to these students.[179] However, according to Ms. Weinberg, because many obstacles remain in this realm of education, the James Still Learning Center is critical to educational improvements in Knott County. It targets and

[176] Interview with Lois Weinberg.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.

helps students for whom the education system continually fails to adequately provide services. Lastly, the Center complements the objectives of the reform policy because the instruction it provides is consistent with what the public schools are providing.[180] The Center serves public school children and these children are tested according to the goals and guidelines of KERA; thus, the Center has incorporated the entire curriculum of KERA into its own instructional practices.

Another story of how individual community members have effectively promoted service implementation is of Alice Whitaker and her work with the Lotts Creek Community School, Inc. The threat of consolidation had been present in Knott County for a long time. This provoked Alice Whitaker to start raising funds to build a new school building in order to keep the school in her community. After a number of years and in the middle of building, the foundation ran out of funds. Soon after the halt in construction, though, the foundation received a million-dollar donation from one of her aunt's former schoolmates. This enabled the building process to resume, and the school entered into the new building in the fall of 1998. By designing the new school with KERA in mind, Alice Whitaker's foundation has played an important role in KERA's implementation. For instance, unlike the old school building, the new building contains an area designated for preschool classes. Another result of Ms. Whitaker's efforts is the preservation of a community school. In a way, it has actually become more of a community school: there are now more facilities available for the community's use.[181] Community members hold meetings in the building, some of which focus on education issues and some of which do not. Also, their student population has increased significantly, thus serving more of the community's children.[182]

In addition to constructing a new building, Lotts Creek Community School, Inc. regularly supplies social services to the community. It offers food and clothing, as well as the use of the foundation's facilities to groups working on home repairs. As mentioned earlier, the foundation

---

[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Note: This is also due in part to the fact that the school accepts kids who do not do well in other schools—a policy is has maintained for years.

collaborates with the Family Resource Center in providing these services. According to Alice Whitaker, because the foundation is a non-profit organization, it faces fewer fundraising restrictions than the Family Resource Center. The foundation's tax-exempt status allows it—and not the Center—to apply for grants from private foundations and other grant-giving institutions. For instance, the foundation currently receives a quarter of a million dollars per year from a private foundation, connected to the pharmaceutical industry, to offer a prescription drug program in the community. The foundation is also able to apply for assistance from the Christian Appalachian Project, a major operation in Kentucky that donates resources to low-income communities throughout the state. Ms. Whitaker contends that with a joint private-public operation, the school and community are able to do much more together than they would be able to do separately. They are able to do more to nurture a healthy home environment for all of Knott County's children—a goal of KERA.

Beyond building a new school and working with the Family Resource Center to provide social services, the foundation also offers scholarships for graduating seniors. It has been fortunate to receive grants for its scholarship program; however, the number of students continuing onto post-secondary education is increasing, so the need is increasing.[183] The scholarships are for any graduate from their school who moves on to higher education, and all such graduates receive some form of financial assistance. There are currently around seventy individuals who are on the scholarship program, thirty of whom are adults returning to school after a long absence. This program is extremely important to the community, and specifically to the objectives of KERA, because it broadens the potential of traditionally low-performing students. Because of the scholarship program, poor kids in the school now know that higher education is an option.[184] Before they would never have even thought of it as a possibility. Alice Whitaker has always felt that this is the most

[183] Interview with Alice Whitaker.
[184] Ibid.

important service the foundation provides, and her major goal in the future as director is to find more scholarships.

In addition to Alice Whitaker and Lois Weinberg's successes, Sandy Hudson has also contributed to reform initiatives by providing needed services. Sandy Hudson's 4Cs Foundation (Foundations for Children's Futures, Inc.) provides after-school childcare to primarily low-income families, and may later provide services outside of schools and, perhaps, expand into several counties.[185] When Sandy Hudson formed the agency, there was no school-age childcare in the county; thus, there was and still is a definite need for her agency's services. She has never had to advertise the agency's services, because she receives fairly regular requests from schools to offer after-school childcare.[186] By creating a place where parents can bring their kids if they have to work or take care of other pressing matters, Sandy Hudson hoped to help out the community. Her broader purpose was to help parents keep their jobs, help parents move from welfare to work, make kids more stable, build kids' self-esteem, and reduce teenage pregnancies and drug abuse.

The 4Cs Foundation has confronted obstacles in realizing its objectives. It has faced some logistical problems with schools because of administrators' safety concerns; for example, running their services when the school is closed for the day.[187] According to Sandy Hudson, the agency needs to work with those at the upper management level in schools and is usually able to. However, because principals and teachers hold varying attitudes about the need for after-school childcare, there is significant variation in the level of acceptance among schools.[188]

Despite these and other minor obstacles, the 4Cs Foundation has been largely successful in reaching its goals thus far. The presence of the agency has led to a change in the way educators' think about school-age childcare.[189] Sandy Hudson says she has seen more and more acceptance of school-age childcare over time, and is confident that principals will be more supportive as they

---

[185] Interview with Sandy Hudson.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.

realize the beneficial influence these services have on kids, parents, and schools. According to Ms. Hudson, in order for communities to provide the most they can for their children, this shift in acceptance is necessary.

While the contributions of Lois Weinberg, Alice Whitaker, and Sandy Hudson are removed from the legislation itself, they will be instrumental in determining whether some components of the reform efforts succeed at the local level, and whether their district's education system will improve. After all, how are all students able to reach their highest potential without the availability of services for learning differences? How is a poor student ever to realize her or his potential without having the opportunity to attend college? How is a school community able to combat the challenges associated with low socioeconomic status, if it does not offer additional services for its students, such as after-school school-age childcare?

Bureaucratic Programs

To further understand how participation has affected policy implementation, it would be useful to look at whether participation has enhanced the likelihood of success of KERA's bureaucratic programs. These programs include the extended school services program, the preschool education program, professional development, and the ungraded primary program. They are "bureaucratic" in that they are designed to directly impact what educators and administrators do within schools, and do not solicit participation from outside actors, as do school-based decision making (SBDM) and the Family Resource Centers. It appears that community participants could have an impact on some, if not all, of these programs, but have yet to effectively extend their influence into the bureaucratic realm.

Community participants could likely have their greatest impact on these programs by making decisions on funding allocations as parent representatives in the school councils. This is contingent on how well the councils operate though. Discretionary authority on financial expenditures could make the most significant difference in the implementation of professional

---

[189] Ibid.

development. Since KERA, schools possess more flexibility in making professional development programs fit their specific needs, and school councils determine how to spend their program funds. Some conflicts over school and district priorities have ensued as a result. Each school claims to know best what it needs and, thus, does not want the district to tell it how to use its professional development time and money.[190] In Knott County, school-based decision making has not yet effectively resolved these conflicts. The result is that the potential of community participants to impact the implementation of this program is far from being realized. And it will not be realized unless further improvements are made in the running of the school councils.

Interviews suggest that community participation could also have an impact on the implementation of the ungraded primary program. In Knott County and in most school districts throughout the state, teachers have only partially implemented the primary program or have completely ignored it. A number of interviewees commented that the primary program in Knott County is gradually being abandoned, and without support from the public and school community, it will not survive. In fact, the lack of support from educators and parents is largely responsible for the statewide failure of this program.[191] This is why Principal Frieda Mullins, for example, continually attempts to educate her teachers and the parents of her students about the program.[192] According to Principal Mullins, without making this information available, she could lose support for the program within her school's community and then be forced to eventually abandon it. In order to enhance the likelihood of the primary program's success, community members could apply pressure on schools to implement the program in classrooms—a mode of participation that has thus far been wholly absent in Knott County. Or they could continue to inhibit implementation.

Community participation could also contribute to the preschool education program's success, by encouraging parents to enroll their children in the preschools at an early age. However, active community members can provide only limited incentives for others to comply with this

[190] Interview with Superintendent James Pack.
[191] Ibid.

request. Participation's impact on this program is further limited because the program is specifically designed to compensate for the shortcomings of parents and other community factors. The program's goal is to counteract the negative, destabilizing forces in a child's home life. Therefore, the need for preschools would likely decline if parents became more involved in their children's schooling.

It does not appear, on the other hand, that community participation has had much of an impact on the extended school services program. Unless information about this program is widely disseminated throughout the community, parents will not be able to compel their children to participate in it. This explains why Knott County teachers, and not parents, have been responsible for the attendance rates of the after-school and summer programs. In addition, one of the greatest obstacles to the implementation of the extended school services program is the cost of transportation. During budget negotiations, if under financial constraints, the Knott County School Board often eliminates transportation as an expenditure.[193] Because community members continue to exert only a small influence on the School Board, they are unlikely to impact this decision-making process and thus will have little control over the extent to which after-school academic programs are offered in the district.

By looking at community participants' previous and potential impact on these bureaucratic programs, it becomes evident that there is potential for community members to impact their implementation. It is also evident, though, that this potential is severely limited and has yet to even be partially realized. This seems to be largely due to the fact that participation remains mostly individualized—and if not individualized, merely responsive to policy's mobilization efforts. In other words, there lacks a collective effort among community members large enough to determine the direction and success of a program initiative that does not directly affect school children, or that does not directly seek their involvement.

---

[192] Interview with Frieda Mullins.
[193] Interview with Superintendent James Pack.

By affecting school governance and providing additional needed services, community participants better enabled the implementation of KERA. The degree to which their participation matters to implementation is disputable, for the links between implementation and participation are often indirect. Nonetheless, community members impacted the education system to a greater extent than they did prior to KERA. In the 1980s, there were no such links because policy did not impact what actors were doing at the ground level. During that era, community members provided services to students that policy makers had not even attempted to provide. However, there are now more ways in which community members can impact the implementation of reform measures, due largely to the fact that KERA grants more decision-making authority to localities, has set forth wide-reaching goals, and has incorporated the involvement of outside actors. What this means for meaningful participation is another question though.

Conclusion

The story of educational reform efforts in Knott County during the past two decades provides evidence to support my theory that policy can enable participation and, in turn, participation can enable policy implementation. The evidence that most strongly supports my thesis includes: the impact of the Kentucky Education Reform Act on community participation in the 1990s by creating incentives to participate, and community participation's significant contribution to service implementation. Prior to KERA, community members in Knott County had many reasons not to participate, but there is now a greater impetus for individuals to get involved because of KERA. Having acknowledged the role of policy in community participation, it is also important to note that there were many other factors that contributed to participation, before and after the policy mandate. Further, in reference to participation's impact on implementation, Knott County community members have proven to be most effective in providing services to students and the community that policy is unable to provide. This is because community participants often have more flexibility to act and a stronger commitment to make a difference in their communities.

How Policy Matters to Participation

Kentucky's educational reform movement demonstrates the potential as well as the challenges of policy as an enabler of community participation. The story of KERA gives us reason to believe that policy can impact participation in four broad ways: by enhancing capacity, providing new incentives, creating institutional platforms, and mobilizing local actors.

In addition to helping develop skills and compensate for resource deficiencies, policy can enhance potential participants' capacity by establishing links between local entities. Even though these new local networks are likely to have their greatest impact on those already actively participating, they build a greater support structure for local actors, disseminate more widely ideas and expertise, and legitimize their involvement in the reform initiatives.

Policy can also exert a lasting influence on participation by changing the incentive-disincentive structure. For instance, if community members are informed about what is going on in

their communities and are more aware of how and why they can partake in reform initiatives, then the reasons to participate will increase. KERA provides another example of policy's potential to create incentives: It has begun to make schools more receptive to outside input by replacing the former education culture. The results of such a cultural shift are slowly coming into effect, and it is already clear that this shift will more effectively connect schools with their communities.

By building institutional platforms on which to participate, it appears that policy largely impacts existing participation. In order to take advantage of the new opportunities that platforms provide, community members are likely to have already been recruited by "insiders" to get involved or to have already possessed some level of participatory capacity. In addition, another determinant of how much policy can enable participation by providing new platforms is the dissemination of information. Only if community members have access to information on how to make use of these new platforms can they eventually use them as designed by policy makers.

In both phases of this analysis, educators impacted participation by mobilizing parents and other community members to act. Among those interviewed there was some mention of educators' efforts to work with the community. According to the community participants, though, this was not a primary contributor to their involvement. Most of the educators interviewed, on the other hand, named specific incidences in which they depended on outside involvement or made an effort to bring community members into their schools and classrooms. It appears, then, that participation initiated through mobilization is more temporary and more limited in its implications (e.g., directed at only the participants' children in their particular classrooms) than the modes of participation that the community interviewees adopted. However, it is also apparent that policy can strengthen the role of educators as mobilizing agents and thereby increase the level of participation.

In conclusion, the case study of KERA demonstrates that when policy enables community participation, the possible implications are fourfold. They include more means by which to participate, the introduction of individuals into the democratic process, a greater legitimization of outside involvement, and a greater public awareness of the importance of getting involved and of

their access to the democratic process. The positive correlation between policy and participation does not provide evidence that participation is completely reliant on policy initiatives, however. There are clearly other ways in which participation can be initiated, ways that are completely separate from the statute.

Other Factors of Participation

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the political science literature on participation proposes numerous, overlapping variables predicting participation in the democratic process. Although the focus of this study was on the ways in which policy, a variable not proposed by the literature, impacted participation in the educational reform movement in rural Kentucky, many of these other variables were also present. There was evidence to substantiate aspects of these participation models, including the socioeconomic status (SES) model, Rational Choice Theory, Verba et al.'s Civic Volunteerism Model, and Rosenstone and Hansen's model. The evidence is derived not only from the explanations for the presence of participation prior to the policy mandate, but also from the ways in which policy succeeded, by addressing the factors that were missing—and thus were inhibiting—participation by ground-level actors.

The SES model, in particular, describes accurately many of the characteristics of community participation in this study. The ability of policy to enhance community members' capacity to participate proved most crucial for participation in low-income communities. This is due in part to the challenge of developing participatory skills among those who lack the basic skills with which to begin. Another reason why such an influence would be instrumental to low-socioeconomic participation is that many individuals in low-income communities continue to lack sufficient personal resources to participate. In both phases of this study's analysis, socioeconomic barriers to participation were ever present. People continue to have large families; the percentage of families with two working parents is growing; and lack of transportation remains. In other words, policy was severely limited as an enabler of participation because of its failings in overcoming personal resource

deficits.[194] Many of those who participated in the Knott County reform efforts already possessed some personal resources to do so, and disputably, those who had the largest impact during both phases already possessed these resources.

Related to the SES model's focus on socioeconomic status is Verba et al.'s focus on the socialization process of civic life. The impact of this process on participation was also clearly present in this study. The two community members, who arguably had the greatest outside impact on the education system in Knott County, were the two who had lifetime associations with political activity and community work: Lois Weinberg and Alice Whitaker. This association is not a requirement of active contribution to the KERA implementation process, however. Two community members not socialized for civic life, Sandy Hudson and Josie Cornett, contributed significantly to the implementation process, by filling a need that was not being met and by fulfilling a role that has often been neglected.

Socioeconomic status and other related characteristics, like the socialization process, were undoubtedly factors of participation in Knott County. It is evident, though, that this is not just a story of better-off people in high-poverty areas participating. Norma Craft, Josie Cornett, and Sandy Hudson were not part of a local elite, and were not necessarily better prepared for civic responsibilities than other community members.

Admittedly, the policy mandate deals with not just any type of reform policy; it deals with educational reform policy, which generally creates different types of incentives to participate for community members, particularly those who are parents with children in the school system. As Rational Choice theorists would argue, these types of outside actors will more likely weigh greater benefits in participating than they would if, for example, the initiative dealt with public transport or waste management. As is evident from the stories told, a number of community participants were spurred to involvement because of concern for their children's learning progress. Norma Craft

[194] These "personal resources" include free time during school hours and school events, easily accessible transportation, extra cash for initial costs, and so forth.

wanted to be more active in her daughters' lives. Josie Cornett and Lois Weinberg were concerned about the quality of education their children were receiving, and thought their involvement might help improve it.

It is also evident, though, that this is also not just a story of parents getting involved in their children's schooling. Parents' concern over their children's education is clearly part of the story, but it does not fully represent what has happened. The role that the importance of the issue, education, had on participation can better be understood outside the framework of Rational Choice Theory, absent the premise of self-interest. We can view the community participants as being moved to action by what the Civic Volunteerism Model terms "issue engagements," or what Rosenstone and Hansen refer to as "issue salience." Individuals got involved in the 1980s and 1990s for similar reasons: community members, who decided to partake in local decision-making processes, were those who believed that involvement in their children's schooling and in civic affairs was important and was consequently worth the possible costs such involvement would accrue. Thus, many community participants acted out of a perceived necessity or out of a sense of civic responsibility.

Even before KERA, there were a couple of participants interviewed who were not participating in order to directly impact their children's schooling. These two 1980s participants are Shannon Bailey and Alice Whitaker. Most of Mr. Bailey's initial engagements had no direct impact on his children or their school, and Ms. Whitaker became directly engaged in reform efforts only after her children had grown. Further, following KERA, it was not just those already familiar with local decision-making processes that contributed to the implementation of KERA within Knott County. One of the participants interviewed, Sandy Hudson, became involved without any prior "training" or experience, and with a focus far broader than her own son's education. Also, it is important to note that her involvement would have changed drastically if it were not for the 1990s educational reform policy. KERA assisted Ms. Hudson in impacting the community at the level and scope she had hoped for.

In order to understand the various dimensions of community participation in this story, we should not only explore the reasons the participants give for involvement, but also the type of impact they were intending to make, and have made. In other words, even though Lois Weinberg initially got involved in the Knott County school system because of her concern for her sons' future welfare, her involvement and impact have since expanded far beyond that initial concern. Her active involvement in the community has not only had lasting effects on other community members and their children, but it has contributed significantly to the implementation of KERA. She has thereby improved schooling for hundreds of children, in Knott County and beyond.

The same is true of Josie Cornett, who had developed a great concern for her children's academic process after her first daughter's unfavorable grade school experience. Josie Cornett became involved in her children's schooling through the PTO, but she was able to impact many of the other school children in the process. Furthermore, like many others, her level and scope of participation expanded after the enactment of KERA. As a parent representative on a school council, she was able to have at least some input on the decision-making processes of the entire school—an authority once relegated entirely to the district's school board.

Alice Whitaker is yet another example: She was not a parent in the county, but her leadership of Lotts Creek Community School, Inc. impacted nearly every child who attended the Cordia School. Also, even though Shannon Bailey has been a father with children of school-age during his involvement, his community activities have reached well beyond his children's individual schooling. Opportunities for such an impact were extended even farther with the enactment of KERA and, more specifically, with the implementation of the Family Resource Centers.

Clearly, these and other community members participated with the intention of impacting not only their own children's schooling, but also the education received by many of the other district's school-age children. It can, therefore, be concluded that this is more accurately a story about community members who wanted to initiate improvements in their district's school system.

Another variable presented by Verba et al. in their Civic Volunteerism Model that is present in this study is what can broadly be defined as "institutional support." Besides those institutions relevant to the socialization process of civic engagement, there were other institutions that impacted community participation. These institutions were not a part of KERA, or were not created by policy makers; rather, they were community institutions like Lois Weinberg's Learning Center. Even before her Center was formally instituted, many parents became drawn into and more informed about the schooling process and, later, the educational reform movement. Inversely, when looking at the absence of institutional support and how policy specifically addressed this deficit, it becomes clear that institutional support is a factor of participation in this story. As previously illustrated, prior to KERA there were some active community members, but they were loosely organized. KERA has strengthened participation by creating some sort of network for various actors, insiders and outsiders, to work together and learn from one another.

Verba et al.'s Civic Volunteerism Model and the other models presented in the introduction to this thesis are noteworthy, not only for comparative purposes, but also for the variables of participation they offer that are relevant to this study. The characteristics of community participation in Knott County do substantiate aspects of these models, but they do not fully support them. In fact, the findings from this study demonstrate that not one—or even two—of these models provides a complete picture of why community members participate in democratic institutions, particularly in high-poverty areas. The findings further prove that policy is able to compensate for these missing variables, and that policy often falls short when it is unable to foster participatory enablers (such as personal resource surpluses, access to local networks, and sufficient information about institutional platforms and supports).

How Participation Matters to Implementation

The story of Kentucky's educational reform movement also illustrates that participation can promote policy implementation. To understand why participation matters, one element of policy we should be concerned with is governance. If policy permits a change in the governing structure, then

participation can impact policy governance by flattening the decision-making process. For instance, it would have been unlikely that 1990s participation in Kentucky could have affected the implementation process if KERA had not created an institutional platform—the school councils—that has allowed community members to become decision makers.

Furthermore, it is not clear how beneficial community participation is for local decision-making processes. In Kentucky, we can see that parents have the potential to possess control over school governance, through participatory means such as the school councils. From parents' experiences on the councils, it appears that their participation did not become more effectual or more rewarding. In fact, participation in the schools' governing structure had somewhat of the opposite affect: it created disincentives to participate by frustrating, if not disillusioning, the parent representatives. Even though the councils may have negatively impacted participation, it is still too difficult to assess how much community involvement in governance positively impacts education. This is because the councils have only been implemented within the past five years or so. The lesson to be learned from the school councils is that a more level decision-making process could bring many benefits to reform initiatives, but it is also likely to evoke resistance.

The greatest way community participants can impact policy is, perhaps, by enabling service implementation. The government—its institutions, agencies, and officials—can provide only so much to the people, and if a policy is ambitious, it is even more likely to fall short of providing the resources and services as it was designed to. Because participation was instrumental in providing services to students and to the community, in both phases of the Kentucky story, it is further apparent that community participants possess the ability to expand the provision of services without a policy-formulated impetus.

The story of KERA's implementation also demonstrates that community participation's impact on policy implementation is limited, because it is unlikely to affect the reform initiatives not explicitly involving outside actors. It appears that community participation could have a minimal, indirect impact on these bureaucratic programs, but this would require a larger, more networked

group of local actors. A conclusion is that participation's impact on policy implementation is determined to a significant degree, but not solely, by the related ways in which policy enables participation. We can also conclude that community participation's effects are more likely beneficial to a given social reform if outside actors get involved in more individualized ways, apart from a statute's provisions.

Why Participation Matters

There are a number of reasons why participation is considered to be important and worthy of concern, regardless of its direct or indirect implications on policy. According to noted political theorists, among these reasons are stronger democratic institutions and decision-making processes, personal growth, economic liberation, greater productivity and efficiency, a greater responsiveness on the part of policy makers, and a closer realization to the democratic ideal of "equal say."

As outlined by Dachler and Wilpert, there are four major theoretical orientations for participation.[195] Democratic theorists argue that participation is important because it helps improve the decisions made within the democratic process.[196] According to Democratic Theory, the strength of democracy and its institutions is dependent upon the engagement of every citizen in the democratic process, since each individual possesses the capacity to participate and contribute to civic life. For socialist theorists, participation in the production process is important because it leads to every citizen's economic liberation, which then leads to a revolutionary change of the entire societal structure.[197] According to the Human Growth and Development Theory, participation leads to a psychological or spiritual growth of the participant. Such a growth is possible because participation is a part of human beings' basic hierarchy of needs and thus occurs naturally.[198] Lastly, the Productivity and Efficiency Theory states that participation is likely to increase "effectiveness":

---

[195] H. Peter Dachler and Bernhard Wilpert, "Conceptual Dimensions and Boundaries of Participation in Organizations: A Critical Evaluation" *Administrative Science Quarterly* 23 (March 1978), p. 80.
[196] Ibid., p. 81.
[197] Ibid., pp. 82-3.
[198] Ibid., pp. 83-4.

tasks define issues, more information leads to greater productivity, and workers gain control over their own lives.[199]

Verba et al. develop their own theoretical orientation for participation. Their theory is separated into two branches: the one "voice" and the other "equality." The first branch refers to the importance of participation in voicing the preferences and needs of citizens to policy makers.[200] By communicating with policy makers in such a manner, citizens apply pressure on them to address their preferences and needs. In other words, it provides an incentive for policy makers to pay attention to what citizens have to say.[201] The second branch, "equality," refers to the special place equality has in the conceptualization of democracy. Our democracy is threatened if there are discrepancies in political participation, because in a democracy the government is supposed to equally consider the interests of each citizen.[202] After all, it can not equally consider interests if only a few interests are voiced.

Suggestions for Policy Makers

Since participation does seem to matter to policy, democratic life, and the welfare of communities and their members, it seems that policy makers would want to enhance community participation in the democratic process. One way to better accomplish this may be to help maintain localized structures, such as small, closely-knit political institutions or community schools. By localizing reform initiatives, policy makers are better able to make them more compatible with local needs. This in turn makes it more appealing to participate and to take responsibility for policy's successes and failures.

Policy makers could also enhance participation by helping individuals develop early on the skills they need to participate. This may mean that educational institutions would stress democratic

---

[199] Ibid., p. 85. This argument is also more-or-less advanced by Louse Lamphere and Guillermo Grenier, "Women, Unions, and Participative Management: Organizing in the Sunbelt," in *Critical Studies in Organization and Bureaucracy*, ed. by Frank Fischer and Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1984)

[200] Verba et al., *Voice and Equality*, p. 11.

[201] Ibid., p. 1

participation in their curricula. Children could learn in schools how to register to vote, to contact representatives, to organize meetings and events, and to form coalitions for collective action. Also, students could learn communicative skills in speech and writing, as well as skills in group-work. As Verba et al. delineate, an individual is more likely to participate in the democratic process, if s/he had lifelong associations to civic life. If people are socialized into civic engagement, whether through school, family, volunteer organizations, or religious-based institutions, then there is a more favorable chance they will become active community members.

The one constant barrier to participation in the case study of Knott County was a lack of personal resources due to low socioeconomic status. It follows that a long-term approach to addressing the problem of low participation in low-income communities could be the social and economic development of these communities. Within the context of educational reform, this may include stronger labor laws for menial jobs that would institute shorter days, more convenient hours, and paid time-off for family crises. Policy makers should also consider making preschool education, daycare services, and school-age after-school and summer programs more readily available within these communities. Furthermore, to overcome the obstacles in transportation, policy makers could develop a more convenient and affordable public transportation system or a local carpool service. All of these policies would continue the process of breaking down barriers to participation facing local actors within low-income communities.

---

[202] Ibid., pp. 1 & 11.

Appendix A

Interviewee	Title	Date
Sandy Bailey	1980s Teacher/1990s Director of Special Education	12/23/99
Shannon Bailey	1990s Community Participant/Regional Coordinator of the Family Resource Centers	1/5/00 2/29/00
Jane Campbell	1980s Teacher/1990s Instructional Supervisor	12/20/99 3/2/00
Norma Craft	1980s Community Participant	12/21/99
Josie Cornett	1980s and 1990s Community Participant	12/20/99
Sandy Hudson	1990s Community Participant	1/6/00
Roger Martin	1980s and 1990s School Business Administrator	12/23/99 3/1/00
Frieda Mullins	1980s Teacher/1990s Principal	1/4/00 3/2/00
James Pack	1990s Superintendent	12/21/99
Brady Slone	1980s Teacher and Principal; Early-1990s Administrator	1/5/00
Lois Weinberg	1980s and 1990s Community Participant	1/5/00 3/2/00
Alice Whitaker	1980s and 1990s Community Participant	1/6/00 3/1/00

Appendix B

Interview Protocol for School Community:

1) How were you/have you been involved in the education system in Knott County?
    a) What did you do?
    b) In what capacity were you involved—
        # what was your role? was it designated or not?
        # were you taking off where someone else left off?
        # how much time and effort did you spend?
2) What did you hope to achieve through involvement?
3) What did you do specifically to achieve these particular goals?
    a) What were you thinking when you made these decisions?
    b) What helped you?
    c) What set you back?
4) What did you hope to gain personally from involvement?
5) Did you try to get anyone else to join you?
    a) Who?
    b) Why did you invite that person?
6) What were your initial feelings of KERA? Were you optimistic or skeptical about:
    a) its approach to educational reform?
    b) the probability of its "success" in improving public education?
    c) your designated role in implementing its reform initiatives (if such a role existed)?
7) How did your feelings of KERA coincide with and/or diverge from the perceived opinions of:
    a) the general public?
    b) policymakers?
    c) the school community?
8) How did you come to see yourself as part of the KERA implementation process?
9) What kind of affect did your efforts have?
    a) Intended or unintended?
    b) Tangible or intangible?
10) Why do you think it had this affect?
11) More generally, what has your school/school district done?
    a) What has changed?
    b) Which KERA reform measures have been implemented and to what extent have they been implemented? More specifically, what about:
        # school-based decision making (school councils)?
        # professional development programs for teachers?
        # pre-school program?
        # extended school services program?
        # Family Resource Centers and Youth Service Centers?
12) What do you think the impact of state officials has been on reform?
    a) What level and form of communication have you and your school/school district had with these officials?
    b) Which officials have you worked with?
    c) How accessible have these officials been?

13) What about the impact of state-level organizations?
    a) What has your communication been like with them? Who has been conversing? About what?
    b) Which organizations have been most visible within your school community?

14) What about the impact of parents and other community members?
    a) Who has been involved in your school/school district?
    b) In what capacity have they been involved?
    c) Has the school system been accessible to them?
    d) Has there been any tension between the school community and these actors?
14) Who opposed reform within Knott County and beyond?
    a) How did this affect reform?
15) When, how, and why did your involvement come to an end?
16) What did you think would happen after you left?
    a) Were your predictions correct?

Interview Protocol for Out-of-School Community:

1) How were you/have you been involved in the education system in Knott County?
    c) What did you do?
    d) In what capacity were you involved—
        # what was your role? was it designated or not?
        # were you taking off where someone else left off?
        # how much time and effort did you spend?
    e) Was there a particular event that provoked your involvement?
2) Did you know of anyone who was involved?
3) Did they encourage you to get involved?
    a) If so, who was it? How did you know them? How did they encourage you to get involved?
    b) If not, did anyone else encourage you? How did you know them? How did they encourage you to get involved?
4) What did you hope to achieve through involvement?
5) What did you do specifically to achieve these particular goals?
    d) What were you thinking when you made these decisions?
    e) What helped you?
    f) What set you back?
6) What did you hope to gain personally from involvement?
7) Did you try to get anyone else to join you?
    c) Who?
    d) Why did you invite that person?
8) What were your initial feelings of KERA? Were you optimistic or skeptical about:
    d) its approach to educational reform?
    e) the probability of its "success" in improving public education?
    f) your designated role in implementing its reform initiatives (if such a role existed)?
9) How did your feelings of KERA coincide with and/or diverge from the perceived opinions of:
    d) the general public?
    e) policymakers?
    f) the school community?
10) How did you come to see yourself as part of the KERA implementation process?
11) What kind of affect did your efforts have?
    c) Intended or unintended?
    d) Tangible or intangible?
12) Why do you think it had this affect?
13) More generally, what were the conditions of Knott County community life like during the time of your involvement?

a) Were things on an upswing or downswing economically?

b) Was there any visible political tension? If so, between whom?

c) Were there any specific events resulting from existing socio-economic tensions?

14) What do you think the impact of the school community itself (including administrators, teachers, and the like) has been?

e) Who has been involved in reform within the schools?

f) In what capacity have they been involved?

g) Has the school system been accessible to you?

h) Has there been any tension between you and other parents (and community members), and these actors from the school system?

14) What do you think the impact of state officials has been on reform?

d) What level and form of communication have you had with these officials?

e) Which officials have you worked with?

f) How accessible have these officials been?

15) What about the impact of state-level organizations?

c) What has your communication been like with them? Who has been conversing? About what?

d) Which organizations have been most visible within your community?

16) Who opposed reform within Knott County and beyond?

b) How did this affect reform?

17) When, how, and why did your involvement come to an end?

18) What did you think would happen after you left?

b) Were your predictions correct?

Bibliography

Allard, Scott. *Intergovernmental Relationships and the American City: The Impact of Federal Policies on Local Policy-Making Processes*. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Political Science) in the University of Michigan, 1999.

Bardach, Eugene. *The Implementation Game: What Happens After a Bill Becomes a Law*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977.

"Board approves hirings for next school year". *Troublesome Creek Times*. 24 April 1985.

Clements, Stephen. *The Changing Face of Common Schooling: The Politics of the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act (Vol. I&II)*. A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Division of Social Sciences in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Political Science. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago, March 1998.

Collins, Timothy. *Tapestry of Conflicts: A Political Economy of Education and Economic Development (Vol. I, II, & III)*. A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Kentucky, Department of Sociology. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1995.

Dachler, H. Peter and Bernhard Wilpert. "Conceptual Dimensions and Boundaries of Participation in Organizations: A Critical Evaluation." *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 23 March 1978.

Dahl, Robert Alan. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961.

Daley, Ron.(a) "Education package passed in special law session: Local board will need to raise taxes." *Troublesome Creek Times* 24 July 1985.

Daley, Ron.(b) "Board races hottest of election," *Troublesome Creek Times*. 2 Nov 1988.

"The December 3, 1998 Release of Kentucky Accountability Results for School Districts Accountability Cycle 3 Results (1994-95 to 1997-98)." Available: WWW URL: (http://www.162.114.24.81/kirisresults/AllDistricts.asp).

Derthick, Martha. *New Towns In-Town: Why a Federal Program Failed*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1972.

Dove, Ronald G., Jr. *Acorns in a Mountain Pool: The Role of Litigation, Law, and Lawyers in Kentucky Education Reform*. Lexington, Kentucky: The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, 1991.

Holland, Holly. *Making Change: Three Educators Join the Battle for Better Schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

Kentucky Education Reform Act. Frankfort, Kentucky: Legislative Research Commission, April 1998.

Kentucky KIDS COUNT Consortium. *Kids Count Data Book 1997.* Baltimore, Maryland: the Annie E. Casey Foundation, December 1997.

Lamphere, Louse and Guillermo Grenier. "Women, Unions, and Participative Management: Organizing in the Sunbelt." In *Critical Studies in Organization and Bureaucracy*, ed. by Frank Fischer and Carmen Sirianni. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1984.

Lindle, Jane Clark, Joseph Petrosko, and Roger Pankratz, eds. *1996 Review of Research on the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA).* Prepared by the University of Kentucky/University of Louisville Joint Center for the Study of Educational Policy, for the Kentucky Institute for Education Research, May 1997.

Matland, Richard E. "Synthesizing the Implementation Literature: The Ambiguity-Conflict Model of Policy Implementation." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* April 1995.

Mazmanian, Daniel A. and Paul A. Sabatier. *Effective Policy Implementation.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1981.

Miller, Penny. *Kentucky Politics and Government: Do We Stand United?* Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

Mullins, Mike, Geneva Smith, Ron Daley, and the Knott County History Book Committee, eds. *History and Families, Knott County Kentucky (1884-1994, 110th Anniversary).* Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1995.

Olson, Mancur. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Reynolds, Sharon M. "Collins to travel state for education reform." *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 28 Oct. 1985.

"Representative Rose has his own plan to decrease classroom size." *Troublesome Creek Times*, 2 July 1985.

Stamper, Karen. "New diploma offered." *Troublesome Creek Times*, 20 March 1985.

Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993.

"School survey seeks parents' opinions." *Troublesome Creek Times*, 10 Feb 1988.

Steffy, Betty E. *The Kentucky Education Reform: Lessons for America.* Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1993.

"Testers pleased with improvement," *Troublesome Creek Times*, 28 August 1985.

Verba, Sidney, Key Lehman Scholzman, and Henry E. Brady. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Verstegen, Deborah A. "A New Wave of School Finance Litigation." *Phi Delta Kappan*. 76 Nov 1994.

Williams, Walter. "Implementing Analysis and Assessment." In *Social Program Implementation*, ed. by Walter Williams and Richard F. Elmore. New York: Academic Press, 1976.